Stories by

AY EDGINTON, CHRISTINE JOPE-SLADE, G. B. LANCASTER,
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HE CHRISTMAS WILLIAM LE QUEUX.

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BEFORE YOU SWITCH OFF THE LIGHT
BE SURE OF A REAL GOOD NIGHT

BY TAKING

BEECHAM'S PILLS.

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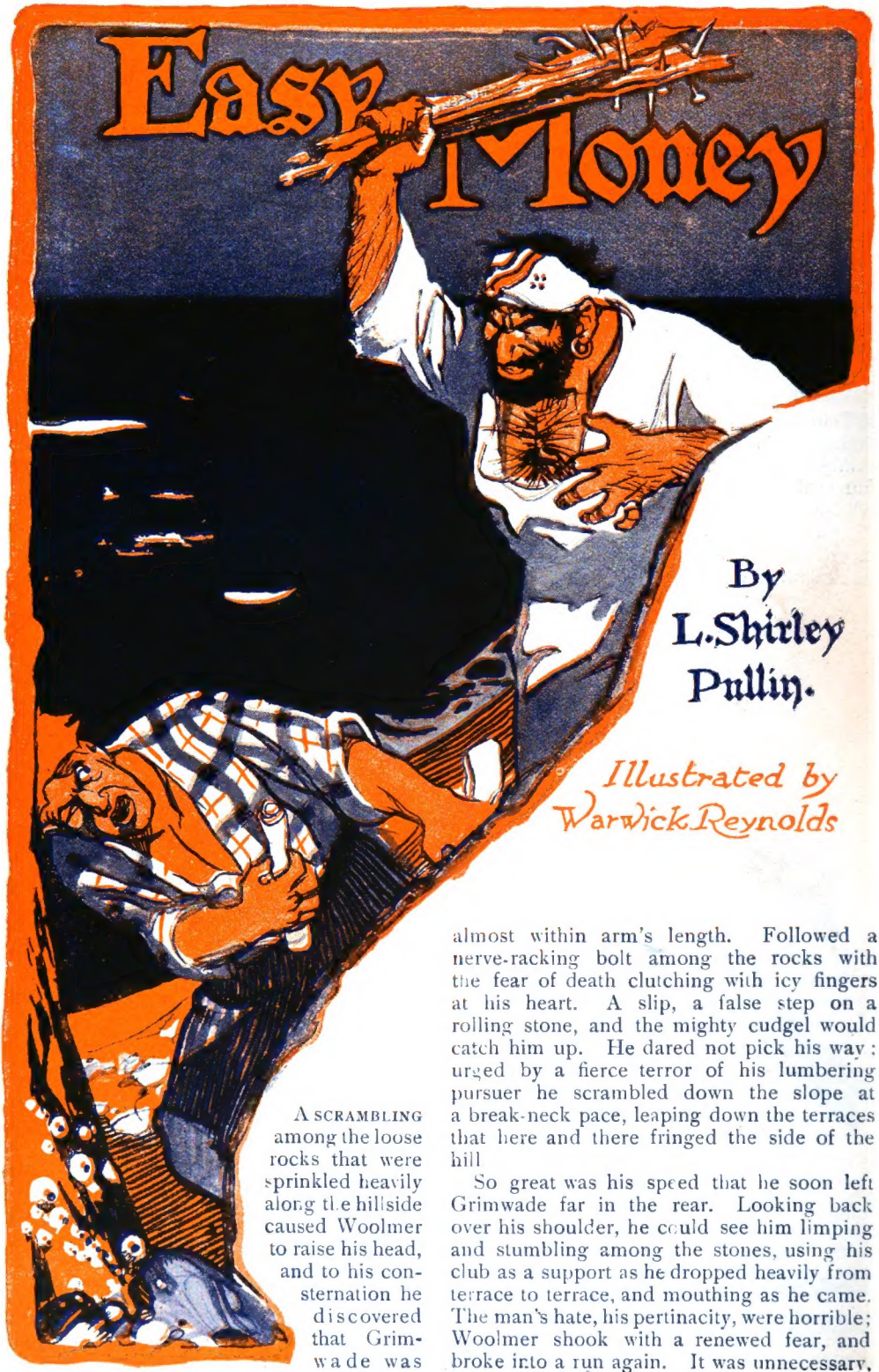
Easy Money



By L. Shirley Pullin.

Illustrated by Warwick Reynolds

A SCRAMBLING among the loose rocks that were sprinkled heavily along the hillside caused Woolmer to raise his head, and to his consternation he discovered that Grimwade was almost within arm's length. Followed a nerve-racking bolt among the rocks with the fear of death clutching with icy fingers at his heart. A slip, a false step on a rolling stone, and the mighty cudgel would catch him up. He dared not pick his way: urged by a fierce terror of his lumbering pursuer he scrambled down the slope at a break-neck pace, leaping down the terraces that here and there fringed the side of the hill

So great was his speed that he soon left Grimwade far in the rear. Looking back over his shoulder, he could see him limping and stumbling among the stones, using his club as a support as he dropped heavily from terrace to terrace, and mouthing as he came. The man's hate, his pertinacity, were horrible; Woolmer shook with a renewed fear, and broke into a run again. It was unnecessary,

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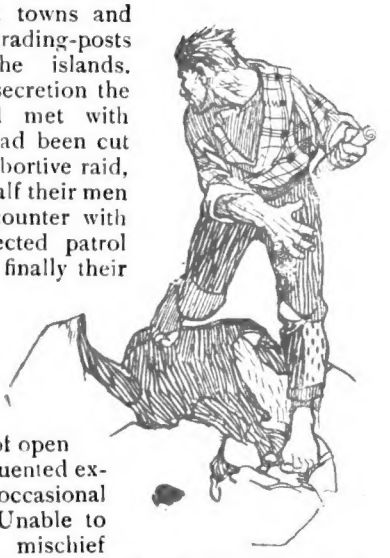
but such was his dread of the man that he was unable to restrain himself. He reached the winding floor of the valley, and struck across it for the flank of the opposing hill. His change of direction fetched Grimwade over his left shoulder, and glancing back, he saw the latter change direction as well to keep the shorter route. Though he was now safe for the time being, he kept looking back in the fear that his enemy might be gaining on him, until he crossed the angle of the hill, and plunged into the valley beyond.

Grimwade and he had been partners in many a questionable concern and had penetrated to all parts of the world in the quest for money. Six months before, at Molu, they had run into a buried treasure rumour, and in spite of the fact that treasure stories are common currency among the islands, this had been sufficiently detailed to appeal to the two hard-headed adventurers.

A down and out white man had given them particulars as an act of gratitude. They had dragged him from a confused fight, where a dozen men, black and white, mad with the lust of killing and penned in murderously close quarters, thrashed about, or trampled one another under foot. They had taken him aboard their tiny schooner and done their best for him. Battered and broken, with his limbs bent in odd places, with gruesome internal injuries, he had lived for days, owing to, or in spite of their rough and ready surgery. He had made a fierce fight to live, refusing to believe, to the very last, that he must die. When at last he realised that it was hopeless, he had given them a small packet of papers, and raging at the fate that took him away at the instant of laying hands on a fortune, he had gone out.

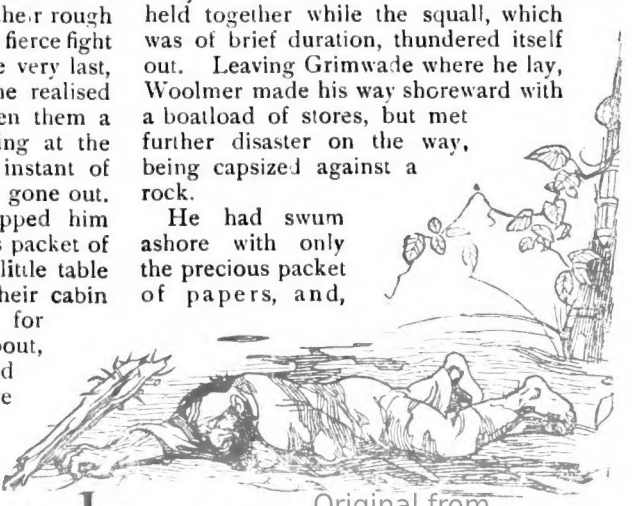
Half-an-hour later, having dropped him overboard, they had unfastened his packet of papers and laid them out on the little table that monopolised the centre of their cabin room. At first contemptuous, for though much treasure is spoken about, little is found, they had soon warmed as they read the details. The trove was modern, being the product of a series of lightning raids, pirate fashion, on American west-coast towns and isolated trading-posts among the islands. After its secretion the gang had met with disaster, had been cut up in an abortive raid, had lost half their men in an encounter with an unexpected patrol boat, and finally their speedy motor vessel broke down in a trackless waste of open sea, unfrequented except by an occasional pearler. Unable to right the mischief they had drifted until, when hailed and boarded by a trade schooner, only this one was left alive. Now he was gone, and Woolmer and Grimwade were left with the secret.



After much discussion, they had decided to take the risk. They had set out for the point marked by the innumerable cross-reckonings, and had arrived in sight of an island that certainly stood on the spot, when a sudden squall had dashed them among a tangled mass of reefs that clustered about its eastern end, and they had struck fairly among upended slabs of rock, spiked and jagged as the jaws of multitudinous rat traps. Grimwade had been smashed against the mast, and thinking him dead, Woolmer had taken the papers from the locker in the hope of getting ashore.

By some thousandth chance, the vessel had held together while the squall, which was of brief duration, thundered itself out. Leaving Grimwade where he lay, Woolmer made his way shoreward with a boatload of stores, but met further disaster on the way, being capsized against a rock.

He had swum ashore with only the precious packet of papers, and,



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It was full of gold; coin, nugget, bar, articles of plate, crumpled to fit in the smallest space. He looked up over his shoulder but his enemy was not visible
WARWICK REYNOLDS

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completely exhausted, had fallen asleep on the fringe of the sea, against the base of a rolling, rocky hill that jutted up through the sand. When he awoke he found to his horror that Grimwade was working his way towards him with infinite precautions against noise. In his hand was a great splinter of wood, stuck through with protruding nails. He was cut and bruised in a terrible manner, and one leg trailed behind him. In a sudden, unreasoning panic, Woolmer had made a rush to escape, and had confirmed the other's suspicions.

Then had ensued an endless pursuit, relentless, ever-continuous, only bounded by the limits of the island, a grim replica of the story of the hare and the tortoise, with the giant Grimwade, armed with his cudgel, half mad with pain and fury, driven by his fear of losing the treasure, in the part of the tortoise. Exceptional physical strength and an iron will kept him on his feet, and he hounded Woolmer from end to end of the place.

How long this had continued Woolmer could not have said. Having once run, he dared not stand; the bare thought of the lumbering fury behind him, the picture his imagination presented to him of what he would resemble if the club once came within range, kept his nerves on the stretch and robbed him of his courage. Though his speed was easily twice that of his pursuer, yet the latter's relentless determination and the small size of the place were heavy handicaps.

Succeeding after an age-long chase in shaking off his shadow, he had remembered the papers. Trembling with eagerness, with many hasty glances over his shoulder, he had unwrapped them from their light oilskin covering, and had laid them out on a flat rock in an endeavour to get his bearings. Soon becoming absorbed, he had allowed Grimwade to come almost within hitting distance; he would not have noticed him then but for the slip of his foot among the rocks, and barely in time, he snatched the papers, and ran.

He plunged into the valley over the shoulder of the hill, and left Grimwade still blundering among the rocks on the farther side. The slope he was now descending was edged along its foot by a belt of low trees and shrubs, beyond which lay the sea, beating, a deep blue in the warm sunshine, against a narrow strip of sand. He must turn, double on his tracks at once, or Grimwade would have him penned with a very fair chance, in spite of his injured leg, of cutting him off. It was essential that he should go back while the other was still out of sight. Recent hard experience had taught him this, and it had taught him that he could do three things only. He could take a sweep round to the right, to the left, or turn straight back along his tracks.

Grimwade had realised this early in the chase, earlier indeed than his quarry, and had chosen to gamble on the three to one chance of meeting his man direct by slanting across to his right. Woolmer, turning naturally to his right, had all but walked into him; only the fact of the ground being open had saved him by giving him a view of his pursuer while yet at fifty yards.

After this the question had become one of importance. Right, left, or straight back? Which would Grimwade decide on? Would a turn to the right carry him straight into his pursuer's arms, or would it leave him some hundreds of yards to one side? If he turned back, would Grimwade be sitting behind the crest of the hill waiting for him?

He left the fateful decision as long as he dared, and then curled round to the right. Tremblingly, he passed round the farther side of the brow of the hill, looking fearfully among the boulders and down the terraces. For the first time Grimwade was entirely invisible. Probably he had gone right down into the valley or—a horrible thought came suddenly—was he lying now directly in Woolmer's path, waiting for him to get within arm's length?

The fugitive stopped, brought up by this new dread. He could see no sign, but the craggy side of the mountain was thick with possible hiding places and the man might be anywhere. A strong wind blew across the hills, and its whistling in his ears made his chances even poorer by drowning slight sounds. The dead stillness everywhere was uncanny; Woolmer looked sharply over his right shoulder. Should he go on or—? Then, his nerves going, he turned and ran down the hill at right angles to his previous course. This took him down into the belt of surrounding trees, where he felt safer and began to eat such fruits as he could find, and some biscuit, sopped with sea-water, that had been in his pocket when his boat capsized, until it struck him that as likely as not Grimwade would come round this side of the hill.

There was a possibility that he would not feel like breasting another great slope; what more natural than that he should come round the foot? To Woolmer's imagination it became a matter of certainty that the other would take this side, and he immediately saw Grimwades behind every tree, in every tangled patch of scrub.

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He made his best speed to get from the cover, jerking his head from side to side as he ran. Once in the open he felt easier, though he still kept tensely alert. His nerves were beginning to rub raw, and the hurried glance over his right shoulder became more frequent.

In a wide, open space, where Grimwade would be unable to come on him too suddenly, he stopped, and, always with the hurried, unconscious glance over his right shoulder, he laid out the papers once again.

There was a fair-sized map of the island among them, with an attached sheet of scrawled directions. The map was marked with a cross, but it was no clue to the exact spot, for it covered what was evidently at least a hundred yards on the ground. He turned to the sheet and puzzled through the sprawled writing. It was a fairly comprehensible list of distances and angles, only needing the base to be easily followed out. The base was to be found by "standing on the highest point of Centre Ridge and looking south. In the dip will be seen a flat slab rock. Beyond, and to the left of that, a green line takes your eye to the boulder from which we measured."

Centre Ridge was evidently the line of connected hills that crossed the island at its narrowest point—big, bare, rounded hills, and he would be in full view from nearly all over the island, if he stood there. He would have to do it, however; it was impossible to be on the island and to remain in ignorance of whether the hoard was there or not.

He stood up and folded his papers. They rustled in the strong breeze, and he was hard put to it to stop them from being blown away. While he struggled with them he thought he heard a stone rattle, and, turning with a jerk, saw Grimwade again.

On the further side of the open space, emerging from the wilderness of boulders, he came on his hands and knees like a beast, evidently to avoid noise. Crouching there, low to the ground, his face upturned, and distorted with hate, a streak of blood running slantwise across it, he presented so horrible a picture that Woolmer screamed as he ran.

In his terror he remembered to take the papers, half-folded as they were, and, as he ran against the wind, they blew loose and flapped in his face. Half-blinded by them, he continued to run, and ran clear over the edge of one of the terraces, falling fifteen feet to soft earth peppered with small rocks. Shaken, cut, and bruised, but otherwise undamaged, he went doggedly on, snatching and crumpling the papers to which he had clung with the grip of a dying man. As he ran he took a curve to the right, swinging round the base of the hill. He continued to run while his strength lasted, and after that went at a scrambling walk, throwing his body forward at each step and breathing in great sobs.

Always now his chin rested on his right shoulder, his mouth gaping open, his tongue passing continually over his drooping lips, his eyes rolling from side to side. Unable to see where he walked, he battered his shins horribly on upstanding rocks and fell constantly. In spite of this, his head was perpetually turned, his chin resting on his right shoulder as a man possessed.

Almost unconsciously he worked round to the centre of the island, where the topmost point of Centre Ridge stood up stark and bare against the blue sky. To reach the hoard he would be compelled to stand up there, and it was of sufficient height to be visible from all over the island. Wherever Grimwade was, if he happened to be looking in the right direction he would see him, and by this time Woolmer dreaded the man with the trailing leg more than he could say.

Still, it was impossible for this to go on. He must find out if the gold existed or not, and, taking his courage in both hands, he made his way towards the crest.

Dare he risk it?

He circled about the peak, that ever drew him more and more, trying, from the clue that the instructions gave him, to place the "flat slab rock." He worked along the southern side of the ridge, questing everywhere for something that would answer the description, but it was difficult from the lower ground to pick out the highest point of the long ridge, and in the valley there were countless upcrops of flat rock of all colours, from a pale greenish blue to the deepest of sap greens. Lichens grew over the whole, and the searcher soon realised how impossible his task was without mounting to the vantage point.

The more he thought, the more the ridge drew him. In spite of his fear that Grimwade might be waiting there for him, in spite of the probability that if he stood up there, his pursuer would observe him from wherever he happened to be, he was unable resolutely to turn his back and walk away. The terrible fascination of easy money and no one to share it, held him like a magnet holds its bar. He sat down in an open space among the boulders, and with one eye always on the peak fell to planning how he could remove the source of danger and win to the gold.

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Could he, dare he if he could, lay a trap that would rid him of his terrible pursuer and leave him to win to the hoard in safety? As he thought, whenever, in fact, the idea of Grimwade flashed upon him, he looked over his shoulder, his teeth showing in a rat-like snarl.

Was there any place on the island where he could suddenly drop a stone on his pursuer's head? He would have to find a raised point from whence, unseen, he could roll a boulder.

There—fifty yards away, was the very thing, a jagged pinnacle of rock standing up among a tangle of slippery crags where a man would have to pick his way too carefully to allow of much observation. Up there, crouched on the ragged crest, he would be partially concealed, and when his lumbering enemy passed unsuspectingly beneath——.

He ran to the rock and, standing at its base, looked long and earnestly for Grimwade as far as his vision carried. He did not want to be caught climbing, or he would be tree'd like any 'possum. There was no sign of movement anywhere in the winding valley or on the terraced hillsides that hemmed him in. He dared not let himself think that his enemy was in hiding and watching him, so he set to work, rolling a gigantic boulder to the foot of the pinnacle. After a quarter-of-an-hour spent in violent exertion, he realised that he would be unable to lift it off the ground, much less climb the rock, carrying it.

For a time he cursed desperately, and then in a frenzy of hurry and fear set himself to find another stone. He made sure of being able to lift it this time, and then prospected round the base of his pinnacle for a point at which he could climb it. It was a mass of spiked projections and razor-like edges offering little difficulty but much danger to an unencumbered man; to an overwrought nerve wreck, laden with as heavy a stone as he could carry, it presented almost insuperable difficulties. Driven by his deadly fear, he held the stone to his body with his left arm, and clutching the highest point of the rock he could reach with his right he commenced his perilous climb.

Twenty feet up, his left arm ached so that he felt he must drop his weapon. Another ten feet, achieved at the expense of unutterable agonies, and then his foot slipped. He clutched at the rock with his left hand, fear of instant death outweighing his hopes of ultimate safety, and, saving himself by a hair's breadth, dropped his stone. It thumped on the earth below; pressed against the face of the pillar, shaking in every limb, he jerked his head round over his right shoulder, in dread lest Grimwade should be in sight.

Not a movement in the sunlit valley or on the wind-blown slopes. Where was the man?—and in an instant the crazed mind conceived as a certainty that he was on the other side of the rock; worse, that he was climbing it at another and easier spot; that he had already reached the top and was crouched above, his club poised, waiting. Woolmer could stand it no longer. He screamed and scrambled madly to the ground, gashing his battered hands yet further on the pointed crags. Reaching the ground in safety, the fact that no avalanche of stones had hastened his descent penetrated to his mazed brain, and he realised that the man with the battered leg could not by any chance have scaled the rock that presented such difficulties to the sounder man.

He grasped the stone again, and was contriving how he could carry it and still leave both hands free, when it struck him with the force of a thunderbolt that though he might reach the top and get safely into ambush, he could not ensure Grimwade's passing beneath.

This was the last straw. He sat down on his now useless stone and burst into a torrent of sobs, great gasping sobs that shook his frame. Even as he sobbed, at frequent intervals he glanced round over his shoulder with the quick, furtive movement of a hunted animal. Grimwade was a present and very real danger; he loomed over the immediate future in terrifying fashion.

The fit of crying had one effect, it relieved his shaken nerves to such an extent that Woolmer could think again. His mind turned immediately to the gold. Grimwade could not be abolished, so he must be risked. There should be no more delay, he would make for Centre Ridge at once, come what might, and he dragged his tired limbs to the erect. His fit of courage was of short duration; no sooner had he left the cover of the rock than the fear of his enemy descended on him as heavily as before. He tried in vain to hearten himself by thinking of the gold, by telling himself that Grimwade was all but helpless—it was no use. That furious face streaked with blood, that awful, ragged cudgel, obsessed him; the nervous movements of his head became more frequent; terror hovered over him again, but the golden lure was stronger yet, and he went on.

He breasted the rugged slopes and reached the rounded back of the ridge. The peak, now fairly obvious, lay to his left. He risked all and ran to it headlong, stumbling among the loose boulders, and in full view from

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everywhere stood erect and looked into the valley to southward. There, sure enough, was a green line, distinct and unmistakable. Straight as if ruled, it was evidently a flaw in the rock filled with rich soil, and grass and creeping plants grew luxuriantly.

Fool! Why had he not guessed it before? He had crossed the deposit of earth half-a-dozen times in his hopeless wanderings, but he had not connected the grass grown strip with the mystifying direction. He set off down the hill at a breakneck pace, Grimwade forgotten in the exulting rush. As he ran he snatched out the papers and was soon feverishly pacing distances at the farther end of the line. Three sharp angles and he stood on the grass-grown strip itself; beneath his torn shoes, a bare ten feet, lay the treasure and, joy of joys, in the tangled vegetation he found the blade of a broken shovel.

There was only one thought in his head now. He hurled the soft earth right and left in a frenzy of work that could not last. Night fell while he was still in a shallow depression only and, completely exhausted, he huddled in it to avoid the biting wind and tried to sleep.

Now that for a time his mental trouble was lifted, hunger, cold and exhaustion had their way with him. With his tissues shaking he huddled in his hole, trying in vain to obtain a little warmth. During the night his physical suffering took charge and banished his terror. The cold wind blew on him over the lip of the hole, laden with wet mist. His cuts and bruises, his smarting and battered flesh, shrank from the chill; he was most supremely uncomfortable and miserable.

Dawn came, a cold, wet, cheerless dawn, grey, streaked with pale yellow, and he stood up in the burrow with his tattered clothing fluttering in the great volume of wind, and looked for Grimwade. He could see no sign of him, so, clutching his arms about his half-frozen body, he ventured stealthily into a grove of trees to find food. Partially satisfied—as much as a starving man can be on fruit—the lust of gold took him by the throat again and he went to work with the shovel blade, scraping into the hole like a lunatic.

It was not till the hole was over six feet deep that he spared Grimwade another thought. "Supposing he came and caught me in here!" flicked across his brain, but so strong was his lust for gold that he forgot again almost at once.

Deeper yet—and the spade bumped on something solid. For some minutes he was compelled to clear the pit of loose earth that continually impeded his progress and then, shaking and glowing with excitement, he went deeper. Yes! there was a box of some sort there, he could feel round it now, and presently he had cleared some part of the sides—sufficient to open it anyway. Using his shovel as a lever he burst the lock and hurled the lid back. Success! It was full of gold; gold of all kinds, coin, nugget, bar, articles of plate crumpled to fit in the smallest space; a fortune—he was made!

And then a handful of dirt fell from the lip of the hole—Grimwade watching him? He looked up over his shoulder, but the cold blue sky rimmed the edge and his enemy was not visible. He must be sitting calmly back on the mound of up-thrown earth, waiting till the digger's head came up over the edge of the hole. It was the last straw. Woolmer screamed horribly twice and then his overwrought mind gave way. He snatched the spade and dug desperately into the side of his hole for protection, the gold again forgotten, and four tons of soft mould slid from the caving sides and ended his agony.

At about the same moment, in a little dingle, sun-splashed, shielded from the biting wind, and quite two miles from the treasure valley, Grimwade groaned for the last time. He had been lying there helpless for nearly two days, ever since, in fact, Woolmer had seen him crawling on his knees, and the poison from his gangrened leg had eaten into his exhausted tissues. Since his pain had left him at the approach of death, nearly seven hours now, he had not moved; in his lucid intervals he had wondered feebly where his mate, Woolmer, was.

The thought of the ill-omened gold troubled him at times. He was vaguely sorry that he had failed to win to it, but he was thinking of a little village school at the last, and consciousness passed from him to the lilt and swing of a schoolboy tune, to which he tried in vain to beat time.

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Mr. John Galsworthy.

A New Serial by John Galsworthy.

It is a great pleasure to announce the commencement, in the January Royal Magazine, of a new serial by John Galsworthy.

This story is undoubtedly the outstanding event of the New Year for lovers of fiction. Mr. Galsworthy, the most distinguished of modern writers, appeals to a very wide circle of admirers both in the British Empire and the United States. There is scarcely a household in this country to which the news of this forthcoming serial will not bring joy.

No Galsworthy-lover will need telling that the new story, entitled "To Let," deals with the emotional side of very attractive characters in the most sympathetic manner. It presents the conflict of youth with age, from which youth suffers so intensely, which age can never understand. In it we see the sins of the fathers (and mothers) visited on the children; youth suffering, as it always suffers, in order to spare age the consequences of actions that took place before youth was even born.

The characters are younger members of that wonderful Forsyte family which Mr. Galsworthy has already immortalised in "The Man of Property," "The Indian Summer of a Forsyte," and "In Chancery."

To say that "To Let" is a magnificent story is no mere piece of editorial publicity. The January Royal, which is published on Dec. 18th, provides, in the first instalment, a very attractive Christmas present for its readers.

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Patricia's Pearl Necklace

By Gilbert Frankau.

Illustrated by Charles Crombie.

I.

THIS is a story of our Mr. Peter Jackson, sometime "senior" partner in P. Jackson and Co., Cigar Importers, of Lime Street, London, E.C. You remember him, perhaps; a dour, stocky, dark-haired youngster, with a toothbrush moustache and curious eyes, which used to change colour, from grey to darkest black, when he lost his temper.

The incident happened before he bought the Nirvana cigarette factory, before he dreamt of being a soldier in the Great War, before he came home wounded from France, to console himself for the loss of both businesses by falling in love with his own wife.

They were just good pals at the time, he and his young "Mrs.," the tall, blond, dignified, rather unsentimental Patricia. Just good pals, though their first daughter, Evelyn, had been born six months.

Evelyn was the cause of the whole incident. The kiddie's arrival made Pat restless. She knew that Peter had wanted a son; realised—and rather resented—his obvious disappointment. If Evelyn had been a son, Peter would have "done something for the lad," something Peterish—invested a thousand at compound interest till the boy was twenty-one, laid down a cellar of port, or (most probably) taken out a fresh life insurance. Evelyn being a girl—he did nothing.

And Patricia thought something ought to be done. Nothing lavish, of course; they couldn't afford to take a lot of capital out of Jackson's, where it earned fifteen per cent., and put it into Consols at three. Still, some tangible celebration did seem indicated.

II.

She broached the idea, very tentatively, one night early in January of the nineteen hundreds. Smith, the efficient parlourmaid, had cleared away dessert from the big mahogany dining-table of their house in Lowndes Square, Kensington. Peter was clipping a "green" cigar preparatory to coffee and liqueurs.

Patricia said: "Don't you think we ought to do something for the kiddie?"

"Do something?" He looked at her through the first haze of his smoke. "It's got a nurse, hasn't it? And a perambulator? And a nursery? What more do you imagine we ought to do for it, old thing?"

She never could get used to that "it"; and her blue eyes held no smile as she answered: "Francis" (Peter's idle-rich cousin, Francis Gordon, was Evelyn's casual godfather) "gave *her* silver brushes for a christening present."

"Francis always was an extravagant ass," remarked our Mr. Jackson. "What's the use of hair-brushes to a thing that hasn't got any hair?"

Nevertheless, even Peter's obtuseness realised that the golden tressed girl in the black charmeuse frock was annoyed about something. She refused a liqueur; sat silent—"fractious," he phrased it to himself—over her coffee. "No good having a row," thought our Mr. Jackson.

"Look here, old thing," he began. She looked—annoyed. "You know I don't approve of making a fuss about the kid. That's Francis Gordonish. But I'll tell you what I will do." He paused, scrutinised the ash of his cigar. "I'll buy *you* a bit of jewellery. Ring, if you like—diamonds. Or a brooch—a sapphire brooch. Jolly stones, sapphires."

"I don't want anything for myself," retorted Pat, but her heart softened, as it always did soften when he displayed interest in her personal adornment. He was so very immature, this twenty-five-year-old husband of hers. One couldn't be angry with him for long.

"But that's all rot," he said, "I'd *like* to give you something. All I object to is

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wasting money on the kiddie. It'll want plenty of money when it grows up. Why, dash it, Pat! do you realise that we may be talking about its marriage portion in a few years from now?"

And at that it seemed to the mother-heart of Patricia as though she saw a vision: Evelyn, grown up; Evelyn in white satin, a lace veil over her brown hair (she *had* got hair, whatever Peter might say!); Evelyn being married to an entirely eligible young man at St. Jude's, Kensington. Moreover, round Evelyn's young throat hung a necklace, a necklace of pearls, her mother's gift.

"All right," said Pat. "You *shall* give me some jewellery. Only it mustn't be a ring or a brooch. It's got to be something really worth while." She hesitated. "I want a necklace, Peter. A pearl necklace."

"The devil!" thought our Mr. Jackson. "*That* can't be done a penny under seven-hundred-and-fifty." (Even pearls were a possibility in those far-off days!)

"Pearls are a good investment, aren't they?" went on the woman who knew her husband.

"Oh, quite. . . . I say, you're not pulling my leg, are you, Pat? . . . We're not millionaires, you know."

"Pulling your leg," she smiled back at him. "Rather not. It's a pearl necklace or nothing. But I shan't be a bit vexed if you don't give it to me."

She changed the subject, and neither that night nor for many a long day thereafter was it again alluded to between them.

Reticent animals, our Mr. Jackson and his "Mrs."!

III.

Breakfasting in his wife's company on the morning after their discussion, our Mr. Jackson preserved his usual silence. He anticipated an interview of more than ordinary importance in the City that afternoon, and, like most good business men, was busy turning over the details of it in his mind while that mind still felt fresh. But, somehow, the idea of the pearl necklace disturbed thought. Had he actually *promised?* If not, could he—with any decency—refuse? If so, how the devil was he going to get hold of the money?

Kissing his wife good-bye, he thought "Good old Pat. She's a ripper. No sentimental nonsense about my Mrs.? But seven-hundred-and-fifty quid is seven-hundred and-fifty quid."

On his way to the office he dropped into the Army and Navy Stores, and succeeded in selling them six cabinets of *Corona Coronas* at a price which left about enough profit to pay his taxi. "Curse these Trust goods," ruminated our Mr. Jackson, "one could sell them all day and all night without making expenses. Might just as well take one's money out of one pocket and put it into the other."

It may here be mentioned that "The Trust" was the billion dollar corporation domiciled at Fifth Avenue, New York, which had just butted into the Havana cigar business, much to the chagrin of Peter and various other merchants whose interests, both financial and sentimental, lay with the "Independents," and that the interview which had busied our Mr. Jackson's mind was with the new—and by no means "easy"—representative of that octopus-like entity.

"You can say what you please," said our Mr. Jackson's elderly partner, Tom Simpson, as they discussed the forthcoming appointment. "You can say what you please, but I don't like these Yankee monopolies. In your father's time we wouldn't have anything to do with them at all. Cheek, I call it, coming to us like this. They only do it because they're losing business."

"Possibly," remarked Peter.

Tom Simpson wagged his brown beard doubtfully, took his top-hat from behind the door and went out to lunch at *The George and Vulture*. On his return he perceived the "back office" to be fuller even than usual of blue cigar-smoke, and entering found his partner already deep in converse with Thomas B. Edgar, Vice-President of the Havana Cigar and Tobacco Factories, Inc.

Edgar, a clean-shaven, heavy-jowled, blue-eyed Virginian of nearly fifty, was holding forth at some length. He rose to shake hands with Simpson (whom he knew, though senior in age, to be Peter's junior in capital holding of Jackson's) and continued his harangue.

"So you may just as well admit," concluded Edgar, "that—as you've got to handle a certain percentage of our goods it would be wise for you to make at least as much money on them as the other fellow."

"Precisely," said Peter. "Point is—how much does the other fellow make?"

"That," retorted Edgar, "depends on how many cases he buys."

At which point Simpson, chipping in with a heavy, "I never did approve of differential terms between shippers; it seems to me against commercial morality," was met with Peter's aphorism: "My dear Tom, commercial morality's the other fellow's point of view," and subsided into silence.

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"Look here, Edgar," went on our Mr. Jackson, fixing his weed at the corner of his mouth in a manner slightly reminiscent of Captain Kettle, "do I understand that we're not on rock-bottom terms for your goods, because if so——"

"My dear sir," countered the American blandly, "can you tell me any reason why you *should* be on rock-bottom terms? You don't *push* our cigars; you only sell them when you're obliged to. All your effort goes on the Independents."

"Naturally," admitted Peter. "We don't make any money on your stuff."

They eyed each other for a moment or so; then Edgar said: "But supposing I make you a proposition by which you could make money, big money, on our brands?"

"Meaning an inside rebate?"

"Well—" the American's cigar had gone out; he threw it into the grate, took a fresh one from his pocket, and lit up with irritating slowness—"well—not exactly a rebate."

There intervened a considerable silence, during which—for the first time in his business career—our Mr. Jackson allowed home thoughts to obsess him during office hours. Here, perhaps, was a chance of making that seven-hundred-and-fifty quid!

"You see," went on the shrewd voice of Fifth Avenue, "rebates in our country have rather a nasty name. Our Interstate Commerce Legislation——" He waved a deprecatory hand. "So I wouldn't like to call it exactly a rebate. No, sir, Mr. J. B. Duke does not approve of rebates. But he does approve—I have his authority for saying that he approves—of payment by results. That, after all, is only common fairness to our importers."

"You can call it anything you like," decided Peter, "provided we can make a thousand or two out of it."

"There's no limit to this proposition," said Thomas B. Edgar. "How much did we ship you last year?"

"Fifty-seven thousand five hundred dollars twenty-four cents." Our Mr. Jackson rather prided himself on accuracy in money matters.

"You could have done double that if you'd wanted to."

"Possibly. Possibly not."

The seller hesitated; made his proposition. "Well, if you're prepared to double your business this year, I'll give you back ten dollars out of every hundred. On the whole year's business."

"Goods ordered or goods shipped?"

"Shipped, of course. We don't want you putting in orders to make up your quantity on the thirty-first of December."

"But supposing we give the orders in time and you don't ship 'em?"

"We'll ship 'em all right."

"Is this to be a verbal arrangement?" put in Simpson.

"No, sir; I'm prepared to give any undertaking your lawyers and our legal department can fix up between them."

For the purposes of our story it suffices that, after various other discussions, Mr. Thomas B. Edgar's offer was accepted.

IV.

Now the whole jest of the English Havana cigar-business is, or was, this: That you cannot, even by taking thought, increase the number of smokes for which the consumer is prepared to pay. Resultantly, if Jackson & Co.—in order to make that ten thousand dollar concession—wanted to expand their trade in Trust goods, only two ways of doing so lay open to them. They must either displace their own sales of Independent cigars or—take Trust trade away from their competitors.

Our Mr. Jackson being, at that period of his career, a purely predatory animal, chose the latter method; and a very pretty struggle ensued between his firm and what Maurice Beresford of Beresford & Beresford (the leading handlers of Independent goods) called "the other thieves in the cigar-trade." So that, for some months to come, the telephone operator at Lime Street overheard various conversations on the following formula:

"Hello, is that Mr. Jackson?"

"It is."

"We're So and So's. Have you got any '*Corona Coronas*'? (Or '*Murias* sixpenny,' or '*Bock Perfectos*'?")

"Yes. We can do you two thousand in hundreds. (Or a 'case,' or 'half a case,' or 'three thousand.'"

"What's your price?"

"Eighty-five-and-six in bond."

"I can do better than that."

"Make it eighty-five—to you."

"Eighty-four. I can buy them at that from Schornsteins."

"All right. But you must take the lot."

By the time July, and with it the necessity for making out their "Christmas orders" came round, one new feature was abundantly evident: Thomas B. Edgar's liberality had not been confined exclusively to Jackson & Co.

"We're being done in the eye," said Simpson gloomily. "What's the use of a concession if he gives it to everybody?"

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"He's acting up to your standard of commercial morality," grinned Peter. "I rather like old Edgar. There's no sentiment about him anyhow. We've got a longish way to make up that hundred thousand dollars."

"We have," grunted Simpson. "And my advice is to chuck up the whole thing. They've only shipped fifty thousand dollars' worth so far."

For a moment Pat's pearl necklace trembled in the balance. Then our Mr. Jackson said:

"Damn it, Tom, I'm not going to be beaten. Let's give him an order to make up our hundred thousand dollars right off the bat. They're bound to be shipped by Christmas."

"We'll never sell 'em," prognosticated Simpson.

"Rats! I'll sell 'em somehow or other, if I have to cut the price of *Corona Coronas* to eighty bob."

"We shan't get very fat at that rate."

"It's all extra business," said Peter—and in the end, as usual, got his own way.

Meanwhile the Vice-President of The Havana Cigar and Tobacco Factories Inc., being informed by Isaac Schornstein (his largest merchant customer) that "dat tam fellow, Peter Jackson, will ruin your business—he's cutting de profit to ribbons," consulted his legal department; retailers of the succulent weed rejoiced; and Patricia alternately decided that Peter was mean not to have given her the necklace, and that she had been avaricious in asking for it.

V.

It must not be imagined that the peculiar connubial relationship of the Jacksons excluded—on the husband's part at any rate—a very strong possessive instinct. To Peter, his wife's gold hair, blue eyes, smooth cheeks and smoother shoulders represented very nearly the most attractive thing in the world—the most attractive, of course, being a business deal in which he got the better of the Schornsteins, the Beresfords, the Elkinses, or some other denizen of that centre of Havana cigardom, St. Mary Axe!

Whether Patricia then realised this possessive instinct or not is a point open to doubt. Up to the age of thirty she was a "cold" woman, who thought "that sort of thing" rather troublesome. Still, his admiration pleased her; and during the summer holidays of what they afterwards came to call "the necklace year" she had no reason to complain of inattention.

They spent those holidays at the Grand Hotel, Folkestone—a distinctly ordinary Kensingtonian couple, white-attired by day, evening dressed at night; nurse, baby and perambulator attached for sign of utter respectability.

But our Mr. Jackson, for all his outward ordinariness, was worried. Every evening, as they walked their dignified way down the dining-room, he used to survey the wives and daughters of the other business men. Every evening, as he ordered their wine, he used to think to himself: "Damn scraggy females—Pat's neck and shoulders make them look like skeletons. What's the use of hanging jewellery on skeletons? Now, if Pat had that woman's pearls——" And the over-fat, who usually possessed the most costly adornments, annoyed him even more than the over-thin!

A letter from Simpson did not improve the situation.

"The Trust," wrote Simpson, "are shipping any amount of goods to Schornstein. We got practically nothing in from them this week. I wonder if you could run up for the day on Tuesday. There are one or two things I'd like to talk to you about."

Peter "ran up" to Town for a day—and stayed two nights. The trade, always a hotbed of intrigue, was positively seething. Simpson had heard rumours of a counter-Trust—an amalgamation of the Independent factories and their shippers. The Independent factories intended to take a strong line; would refuse shipments to anyone who handled Trust goods.

"Rats!" snapped Peter when he heard the plan. "All rats! They can't bluff *me* with that sort of tale."

"You may be right," opined Simpson. "But, either way, it can't make much difference to us. We can't sell Trust goods if they won't ship 'em."

Before going back to Folkestone, our Mr. Jackson interviewed Edgar, who promised larger supplies, but did not divulge the contents of a certain paper in his desk, which read: "Jackson contract does not apparently contain any obligation on our part to fill orders."

That evening over dinner, Pat's neck looked ominously bare.

VI.

By the fifteenth of October—what with the incipient annoyances of "Christmas trade," a batch of letters from the Independent factories (all full of vague promises, and still vaguer threats), Simpson's gloom about the unfilled Trust orders, and a casual remark of Isaac Schornstein's, "My poy—two can play at de game of gutting prices"—our

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Mr. Jackson was in a thoroughly bad temper.

"Putrid business!" he fulminated to his partner. "Wish to goodness I were out of it. What the devil *are* we going to do about these Trust goods?"

"What I'd like to know," said Simpson blandly, "is: What are we going to do about the Independents? Maurice Beresford's off to Havana next month—you can bet he'll stir up all the trouble he can. We shall look pretty if both sides turn us down."

Said Peter: "Curse Maurice Beresford. I wish *I* could go to Havana."

"Why don't you?" retorted Simpson. "It 'd be the very thing. Your father always went once a year."

"And who'd look after the Christmas trade, I'd like to know?"

Simpson laughed. "I think *I* might be able to manage that." *Sotto voce*, he added: "You seem to forget, my lad, that I was in this business before you were born."

But it was not until the middle of November that Peter made up his mind to the journey, and even then the conscious mind refused to admit its reason. "You're going to Havana," said the conscious mind, "because it's part of your job to know the manufacturers personally. You're going *via* New York, because that's the quickest way. You'll be back before January, because it would be a waste of time and money to stay any longer."

Whether the sub-conscious mind of our Mr. Jackson—if that curious compound of predatory and possessive male could have made itself audible — would have said: "You're going after those pearls, because you hate seeing Pat's neck unadorned," remains a question for some psychological novelist with four hundred pages (and three hundred readers) to satisfy. All the writer of this tale knows is that they said "Good-bye" to each other in the hall of their Lowndes Square house about as passionately as two icicles—"Telephone Simpson if you get hard up" being the exact phrase which separated them.

VII.

Barring a trip or so to the Continent, the voyage to the States on the *Mauretania* was Peter's first out-of-England experience, and he thoroughly enjoyed it. The atmosphere of luxurious ship-board—particularly of the over-decorated smoking-room—appealed to him. Essentially a travelling man—with a good stomach for the sea, an even better head for wine and spirits, and a knowledge of poker which he flattered himself was fairly complete—our Mr. Jackson made various acquaintances, more or less desirable; was respected by his cabin-steward, ignored by the womenfolk, and generally as average a passenger as any six-day company can desire. Only on the last evening aboard did he revert to his cigar-broking self.

The wind, against which they had been buffeting their three-hundred-and-sixty-knot day, died down at midnight to the faintest of off-shore breezes, as Peter, cigar in mouth, fur coat over smoking-jacket, tramped the abandoned spar-deck. His brain, curiously acute after a week's exeat from the City, perpended many problems. He said to himself:

"To-morrow I'll telephone to Fifth Avenue. Monday I'll call on them. Shall have to go rather gently. These Independents are suspicious blokes. If they think I'm intriguing with the Trust, there'll be trouble. Confound Fifth Avenue! I'm still thirty-four thousand dollars short of doubling my business, and only a month to go till the end of the year. There's no doubt that damn fellow Edgar's keeping us short on purpose."

Turning in, he thought vaguely of his wife, still more vaguely of his daughter. Somehow the two seemed a long way away. And yet, just before he fell into an easy sleep (it may even have been a dream, though one hesitates to connect such a practical youth with dreaming), it seemed to our Mr. Jackson as if, between Lowndes Square and Fifth Avenue, there stretched a long and iridescent rope—a rope of pearls.

Morning, however, dissipated dreamery. It is not given to most Englishmen to appreciate New York, but Peter proved the exception.

"This," said our Mr. Jackson, as a taxi (whose dial showed the most preposterous figures) whisked him under the clanging "Elevated," through little streets plastered with "Chop Suey" signs, into the stately centre of Manhattan Island, "this is IT."

And his hotel, the old Knickerbocker, did not dispel illusion. There was a "snap" ("pep," as an expression, had not yet been invented) about the Knickerbocker which vastly delighted our Mr. Jackson. He told the proprietor so—being quite unaware that Mr. Regan could have bought out Jackson & Co. twice over—in his most patronising Etonian manner before he had been in the place two hours.

The week-end passed in a flash of electric trippery. Peter, already vastly more American than the barber who applied hot towels to his face or the floor-clerk who answered his

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telephone, saw everything — the Flat-iron Building, Rector's, four department stores, a brace of theatres, a music-hall (which he learnt to call a vaudeville), Broadway by night, Riverside Drive by day, the "Peacock Gallery" at the Waldorf Astoria, and so many attractive young women that, faithful though he remained to her, even the American system of keeping cigars in plate-glass-and-porcelain humidors seemed scarcely worthy of mention in his first letter to Patricia.

By Monday mid-day our traveller was sufficiently wise about the place to find his way without inquiry to Fifth Avenue. "And that"—as he himself phrased it—"put the lid on things."

Something about this vast commercial building, with its marble entrance, its speeding elevators, its huge open floor spaces wherein clerks innumerable bent to polished desks under the flickering blue tubes of a just-invented lighting-system, fairly fascinated our Mr. Jackson.

This, he felt, was the home of tobacco business with so big a "B" that the top semi-circle of that letter represented one world-hemisphere and the bottom the other. Which is not to imply that a non-imaginative Englishman of the middle-classes condescended to display any open admiration when he finally found himself face to face with the Treasurer of Havana Cigar & Tobacco Factories, Inc.

"Glad to know you. Hope you had a good trip," said that worthy—a clean-shaven young man with gold eye-glasses and a winning smile. "How did you leave Thomas B.? He writes that you English importers are the very devil."

"Does he?" Peter, shifting his chair so that the window light should not fall on his face, glanced round the bare, shining room. "That's what we say about him, you know."

They chipped each other, after the fashion of cigar men the world over, for a full two minutes. Then Peter said: "By the way, you seem to be very slow in shipping."

"I know." The Treasurer's face fell sympathetically. "We're way behind on our European orders. Mr. Duke was saying so only yesterday. You're going on to Havana, aren't you? I wish you'd tell our fellows down there how you feel about things. It may do them good—put a bit of snap into them. You see," he went on, "this is only an accounting office. The real business is done down there."

"Not much change to be got out of this merchant," speculated the Englishman, who knew quite enough about the methods of business to realise that the reference to "Mr. Duke" must be purest fiction; and he went back to the Knickerbocker with his tail ever so slightly between his stocky legs.

Three more days in New York (on the last of which Maurice Beresford, homeward bound, took him to lunch at Martin's and advised him "not to desert the Independent frying-pan for the Trust fire") did not raise our Englishman's tail to any appreciable extent.

The gentlemen at Fifth Avenue were hospitality itself; they wined him at their clubs, sent him more free cigars than even he could consume, dined him in a private room at the Holland House, where he discovered—to the tune of some eight hundred dollars—that his knowledge of poker had hitherto been based on entirely false premises; but resolutely declined to be drawn into any discussions on the English situation, the which they declared to be entirely up to Thomas B. Edgar.

One of them even went so far as to state: "Of course we're mighty glad to make your acquaintance"—here he added a small bunch from Peter's bank-roll to his own—"but if I were in your position, I wouldn't waste much time in New York. We believe in decentralisation of effort. Edgar makes the running in England. Havana ships his importers the goods they want. *We*—just keep tab on what's happening."

Keeping tab on his own expenses P. J. decided to quit Manhattan Island forthwith. From it he took only one scrap of comfort—a red book entitled "The Science of Draw Poker" by David A. Curtis, Poker Expert of New York.

To one chapter of that book, entitled "Personality in Poker," our Mr. Jackson devoted considerable attention during his three days' journey on the Ward Line's *Morro Castle* to Havana.

VIII.

For your tourist, Havana City is a hot-bed of romance. He, or she, adores the tropical warmth, the busy harbour, the curving sea-front, the palmy countrysides, the narrow street of "Obispo" where mantilla'd *señoritas* stroll (and the unwary tourist is duly robbed by velvet-eyed storekeepers), the wheeled parades at sundown, the mule-bells at mid-day. But to your cigar-man, Havana is a place in which to get busy.

And busy, from the very moment of his arrival, when the friendly Cuban owners of the Independent factories bore him off to a vast "breakfast" at the "Reguladora," Peter

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got. Here, there, everywhere—in "sorting-rooms," in bare tessellated offices, at private houses where one tilted till midnight in the hospitable rocking-chairs of Don Pancho or Señora Panchita (one eye on one's manners and the other on the morrow's deal), in motor-cars or *coches*, at the "Paisaje" or the "Miramar"—you saw our Mr. Jackson, a "green" *Cazadores* mast-like between his teeth, his order-book in his pocket. But only very rarely did you see him in the company of Cyrus P. Norman and his brother trustifiers of the industry at "Zulueta Uno."

For the situation, even as hinted by Maurice Beresford, required an infinity of tact. The smooth-voiced, small-handed Cubans who owned the Independent Factories distrusted not only "El Yanqui," but whosoever did too much business with "Los Yanquis": already, more than one small monopoly of "Pietro Jackson y Compania" trembled visibly towards Peter's competitors.

It took a fortnight of lavish promises, backed by even more lavish orders, to restore confidence; at the end of which fortnight arrived a cypher cablegram from Simpson: "If possible cancel Trust orders." Peter, contenting himself with the laconic answer "Why?" was met with, "Schornstein cutting prices to ribbons. Cannot compete unless we get rebate."

"Oh hell!" said our Mr. Jackson—and started in to reconsider the situation. Reconsidering it over his early coffee and the inevitable cigar, he thought: "Simpson's right. It's the tenth of December. We're still thirty thousand dollars short of doubling our business. Damn the Trust! They've got me by the short hairs. They've done me out of—what's double fifty-seven thousand five hundred?—a hundred and fifteen thousand dollars—what's ten per cent. on a hundred and fifteen? They've done me out of eleven thousand five hundred dollars—two thousand three hundred quid. And," added a sudden memory, "they've done Pat out of her pearl-necklace!"

The boy's gray eyes darkled. He had been done, done brown. And by his own fault. He ought to have made a better contract; he ought to have kicked up hell with Edgar, hell in New York, hell with Cyrus P. Norman. Instead—both in New York and in Havana—he had behaved as though the contract were not in existence.

"Always finessing," he decided. "That's me all over. Too much reticence. Those Trust chaps in New York knew exactly what I was after; might just as well have been open with them. I'll tackle their man Norman about the thing to-day. If I can't get their money—at least I'll tell 'em what I think about them."

But the hatchet-faced Norman, when asked point-blank: "I say, have you had any advice from New York or London about a special arrangement with my firm?" professed the blandest ignorance.

"My job," said Norman, "is to ship goods, not to sell 'em. What's your arrangement anyway?"

By God's especial providence the telephone-bell gave Peter a second's respite; and in that second he made up his mind that Norman was speaking the truth. "We believe," said a voice out of the past, "in the decentralisation of effort." "Do you?" grinned the subconscious mind of Patricia's husband. "The devil you do!"

But the happening itself—my friend P. J. would be the first to admit—was purest luck.

IX.

"Those fellows in New York," said Cyrus P. Norman, "don't know the first thing about the game. You wait till we've got busy on you, Jackson."

They had just finished dinner at Norman's house in the Vedado, and were sitting down to a high game of poker. Six of them—Sol Lewis, a Chicago importer down on a ten-days' trip; Peter; Norman; Jake Garcia, a swashbuckling, black-moustached Cuban-American who ran, under Norman's guidance, three of the Trust cigar factories; Norman's brother, hatchet-faced too, brown-eyed under a thatch of unruly hair; and fat, prosperous Henry Stetson, who attended to the Trust leaf-buying.

"Table-stakes," opined Henry Stetson. "A two hundred dollar table-stake. That's my limit."

"Promises to be a nice cheap evening," decided Peter, who knew that he could lose £40 a minute for the next three hours; and for two of them, holding on to Curtis as a drowning man to a life-buoy, he played so far under the odds of his hands that Sol Lewis more than once ejaculated:

"Say, Norman, you fellows don't seem to treat your English importers as good as us. You ought to make 'em raise your rebates, Mr. Jackson. Then you could afford to sit in a two hundred dollar game."

"He isn't one of *our* importers," laughed Norman, senior. "Wish he were! He wouldn't play so tight then."

Both remarks irritated; nevertheless "P. J." kept his temper—and that "self-control" which Curtis considers so essential

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to the game. But luck and the whisky decanter coming his way, he began to bet more freely.

The night was stifling. Outside, in the dusty garden, no breeze blew. Within, coats had been laid aside, collars taken off, shirt sleeves rolled up. Already, the heavy Mexican dollars, the American paper-money of the party, had almost disappeared from the table. They played on credit now, Norman, junior, pencilling the scores.

And suddenly, luck began to veer, Peter's credits to dwindle. Sol Lewis took two hundred dollars off him on one good hand; Garcia annexed a hundred and fifty—and a good deal of "P. J.'s" nerve—on another. The Norman Brothers bluffed him out, once each, on the poorest cards.

By the time they came to the last deals, his winnings had entirely vanished, and a good hundred pounds of English money with them.

"Seems, after all, as though we might get enough British money to pay for our Christmas dinner," grinned Stetson.

It was the last hand of the evening. Peter, picking up his cards, saw a pair of sevens, made up his mind for a final flutter.

Sol Lewis opened for fifty dollars.

Stetson dropped out. Young Norman, Garcia, and Norman senior came in. "Only one thing to be done here and that's bluff," thought P. J.; and after a pretended sorting of his cards, raised a hundred. The opener dropped out at once; Garcia, thinking things over, did likewise; but the two Normans stayed in, took a brace of cards each, thus showing that, unless they also were bluffing, Peter's two sevens had a pretty poor chance.

"How many for you, Mr. Jackson?" asked Garcia.

"Two," said Peter, concealing the weakness of his position.

He did not look at the cards dealt him, but laid all five—the three he had kept and the two he had bought—face down on the table.

"Your bet," announced both Normans; and the elder added: "These English cigar men are too good for us poor fellows. How much does P. Jackson and Company propose betting?"

"Go all I've got in the world on these three aces," prevaricated "P. J."

Said Norman junior: "I've not got such a bad-looking lot myself. You wouldn't care to take off the limit, I suppose?"

Peter's eyes darkled. "Damn these Trust merchants," he thought. "First they rook me of eleven thousand five hundred dollars on my rebate, and now they're trying to bluff me out of this last jack-pot. Wonder if I bought a third seven."

But he dared not look at the hand which was supposed to hold three aces. It lay winking at him—five polished cardboards on the bare green wood of the poker-table.

"Take off the limit?" dilly-dallied our Mr. Jackson. "That's not according to the rules, is it?"

"Sure. It's the last hand of the evening. Never is a limit for the last hand, is there, Cy?"

Cyrus P. Norman winked at his brother, and threw his hand in. Mart Norman and Peter—sole remaining contestants for the money on the table—eyed each other for fifteen full seconds. The American's grin enraged his opponent; but the rage was only an inward one.

"If I can only bluff him out," thought Peter, "I shall be about quits on the evening!" Then, without the flicker of an eyelash, and in his usual voice, he challenged: "Take off the limit if you like—but, if you do, it'll cost you two thousand dollars to see what I've got."

"Cheap at the price," snapped the American; and, without waiting for his right to see Peter's hand before exposing his own, laid four "twos" face-up on the table.

For the fraction of a second, Peter's heart went stone cold. Even if he had bought a third "seven" it would be useless. Only with four "sevens" could he beat four "twos"; and to have bought the remaining two "sevens" in the pack would be a miracle. To lose five hundred pounds, more than five hundred pounds in one evening, had been the act of a lunatic. Five hundred quid—why that was very nearly enough to buy a pearl-necklace!

"Turn 'em over, Mr. Jackson," said Sol Lewis. "You might have bought that fourth ace."

"Ace!" laughed Peter (the laugh cost a bit of an effort, but he managed it somehow). "I came in on a pair of 'sevens.' Here they are." And one by one, very slowly, he turned over his cards; the ace he had held up with his original pair, the seven of diamonds, the seven of clubs. . . . As he lifted the fourth card and saw the seven of spades, even our Mr. Jackson's fingers trembled.

"Go on," said a voice—Stetson's; but already Jake Garcia, quite unable to contain himself, had exposed the fifth card.

And the fifth card was the seven of hearts. Peter, gambling on a thousand to one chance (he looked the odds up afterwards and found the figures accurate), had brought it off.

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"Go on," said a voice—Stetson's; but already Jake Garcia, quite unable to contain himself, had exposed the fifth card.—

"Well"—Mart, as a good loser, had few equals and no superiors—"it looks to me as though I hadn't won." He turned away, busied himself with the score sheet; his face, in the shadow of the lamp-shade, showed a little pale.

But none of the four Americans was looking at Mart. They were looking at Peter, patting him on the back, offering him drinks, cigars.

"Gee!" said Cyrus P. Norman. "You've got some nerve. If only you ordered cigars from us, same way as you buy cards, we'd pay off our seven per cent. Gold Bonds a year before they fall due."

"But I do order cigars from you." For once in a way our Mr. Jackson felt strangely above himself. "If only you'd ship 'em to me."

"Ship 'em to you?" Mart, his calculations finished, his face nearly composed, turned back to the table. "We ship goods as fast as anyone in this Island."

"Sure," asseverated Garcia. "We can ship a hundred thousand dollar's worth of goods a week easy."

Stetson chimed in. "It's a real pity you're not on our side, Mr. Jackson. We could do with a man of your snap in the English market."

And quite suddenly P. J. saw his "Mrs." She was sitting, all by herself, in the rather

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——And the fifth card was the seven of hearts. Peter, gambling on a thousand to one chance, . . . had brought it off. [*Page* 115, *col.* 2.]

prim drawing-room at Lowndes Square. A *décolletée* gown showed him the glimmer of her white skin. Her lips, parted to a smile, seemed trying to frame a word—but whether that word was his own name or some other single syllable beginning with pe—, our Mr. Jackson had no time to determine; for the vision vanished abruptly as it had appeared, leaving him alone with the five shirt-sleeved Americans.

"Why last week," went on Garcia, "I filled the old *Morro Castle* so full of our goods that they had to raise her Plimsoll mark three feet." He laughed, twirling his black moustache.

"That's the way we do business," confirmed Norman. "Hustle. That's the rule at Zulueta Uno."

It appeared to the five as though the Englishman had lost interest, both in poker-games and cigar-business. His eyes had a far-away look, as though he were trying to remember something. He was; and the something, out of that red book, ran thus: "The necessity for an understanding of human nature . . . is what raises poker above the level of other card games . . . it is a very high-class training . . . for the man of the world."

"Hustle!" he said at last. "Hustle! Why there isn't an Independent on this Island who can't ship quicker than your people."

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Cyrus P. Norman's brown eyes lit. "You try us with a fifty thousand dollar order and see," he snapped—obviously stung.

"Get the goods by the year after next, wouldn't I?" grinned Peter. "No, sir" (this was a flagrant Americanism), "we give our orders where we get served quickest. I told Edgar that months ago."

"Edgar's got nothing to do with the shipping," barked Mart. "Cy and I look after that end."

"Is that so?" drawled Peter. "Is that really so? How very interesting! Then perhaps *you* can tell me why"—he hesitated, took his risk—"you've got thirty thousand dollars worth of goods pending for my account since last July."

Mart, cornered (for the instructions had been very definite, "all orders for Schornsteins take precedence English market"), made his bluff:

"An order for thirty thousand dollars is only chicken-food to Zulueta Uno."

"That's a good one," remarked Peter.

"Good one! How do you mean?"

"What I say."

"You don't believe me?"

"Of course I believe you. I believe you so much that"—Sol Lewis, watching closely, could have sworn that the Englishman's laugh was genuine—"that I'll lay you everything I've won to-night you can't ship those thirty-thousand dollars worth of goods by the end of the month."

"And the Schornstein orders went off last week," thought Mart. "I've got him. Gee, but I've got him." He looked at Cy, who winked; at Jake, who knew nothing about Edgar's cable; at Stetson; at Sol, who—as a loyal Trust man—must be properly impressed before returning to Chicago.

"Dollar for dollar, Jackson," said Mart, "I'll go you that bet. And what's more, if your orders are for stock sizes I'll guarantee to ship them this Friday."

Peter's heart gave a great thump as he answered:

"Very well, then. That's a bet. If you ship the goods we're quits on to-night. If you don't—you'll owe me four thousand."

Some three-quarters of an hour later, listening to the purr of the tropic sea below his windows at the "Miramar," Mr. Jackson wrote the following cryptic figures in the last page of his order-book:

$ 4.000 at 4 80 = £str. 830 about.
$11.500 „ „ = £str. 2,300 about.
Mem.—Cable Simpson have not cancelled orders."

X.

On the twenty-seventh morning of a foggy December a tall, blue-eyed, golden haired girl watched the *Mauretania's* high bow spire up through the rain-drizzle of Liverpool harbour, swing slow to land. On the twenty-seventh afternoon of that same December day she sat alone with a rather *distrait* husband in their reserved compartment on the boat-train. "Naturally," thought the girl, "I didn't expect him to kiss me in public; but here—well once—I think he ought to."

"Enjoyed your lunch, old thing?" asked the rather *distrait* husband.

"Yes, dear. Very much."

"Mind if I light a cigar?"

"Of course not. Are you glad to be home?"

"Rather." Peter clipped his cigar; gazed at his wife through the smoke-clouds.

"And you're pleased with your trip?"

"Quite. Though I don't know what Simpson will say at my orders." The gray eyes twinkled. "Do you know we had thirty thousand dollars' worth of goods on the *Maure ania*. All Trust stuff, too. I made the purser show me the Bills of Lading when I went to his office this morning for——"

She noticed the hesitation in his voice, and asked—in the perfunctory manner of the dutiful wife—"What *did* you go to the purser's office for, Peter?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Mr. Jackson. "Only this."

He fumbled among the folds of his fur coat; extracted a sealed parcel; took a knife from his waistcoat pocket; slit the sealed string; and handed her a flat red leather case, about eight inches long, stamped "Tiffany."

"Hadn't you better open it?" he suggested.

Patricia sat an appreciable while—her eyes very bright, the closed case in her ungloved hands—before she pressed the catch. But when at last she did open it, when she saw the white velvet, and the pearls which glittered on the white velvet, her mind—her average English middle-class mind—knew the worst foreboding of its married years.

"Peter!" she gasped (there could be but two reasons for such unparalleled generosity). "Peter! You—you haven't been unfaithful to me?"

The rest of their journey, in the interests of decentralisation, I leave unrecorded.

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Are We Bloodthirsty Enough?

Written and Illustrated by A. H. d'Egville.

There is a point to which things get when they cease to be things and become Intolerable Afflictions. This point is called The Limit. Only blood will assuage the agony that ensues when things reach The Limit, as Mr. d'Egville points out in this masterly essay.—Ed. R.M.

I HAVE always thought it strange that while so many things occur in our everyday life which exasperate us, so little attempt, either individual or concerted, is made to put a stop to them.

Only the other day, Thursday, I think it was, or was it Friday? No Wednesday of course, it was Wednesday, I chanced to back my way into a leading draper's to buy a reel of cotton. I had followed the usual conflicting directions of the myriad shop-walkers and taken not only the first on the *left*, the third on the *right* and *through* the passage, but also *up* the stairs and *down* the lift on to the second floor. Another shopwalker bowed.

"Cotton, sir? The counter on your left. Miss Griffin, forward."

But Miss Griffin could neither move forward nor backward. There stood before her a tall, angular lady, probably a lady magistrate, who wanted a jumper of some kind. What kind she knew not; not one of the three hundred and sixty jumpers which the unfortunate Miss Griffin had shown her bore the remotest resemblance to the kind of jumper which the lady vaguely visualised.

Miss Griffin was in the last stages of complete exasperation. Only fear of immediate dismissal prevented her from adopting an adequate method of dealing with this type of annoyance. Yet who will deny that she would have been entirely justified, nay, would have had the whole-hearted support of every citizen of the Empire, in throwing every

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No one would blame an exasperated porter for pushing his truck over the type of man who stands on the platform reading his paper and pays no attention to the official's warning shouts.

jumper she could lay hands on into the customer's face?

Every railway station is full of incidents which arouse in us a desire to be bloodthirsty. Who, for instance, has not heard a porter announce that a certain train stops at *all* stations and then seen someone standing by his side ask if it stops at the next station? An incident like this arouses strong desire for murder.

Everybody knows only too well the type of man who stands reading a paper in the middle of the platform while a tired porter, pushing a truck heavy-laden with much luggage, calls upon him again and again to stand aside, or shouts "By your leave" at the top of a well-developed voice.

I do not think there is a man who would blame the porter for pushing his truck over the offender and passing on. I can even imagine the onlookers giving willing assistance in the case of a *very* heavy truck.

Not infrequently I visit the theatre. In fact I have been twice already since the Armistice. On both occasions it has been my misfortune to sit once behind, and once in front of a lady who had already seen the piece, and described in a loud voice to a deaf and short-sighted friend who had no opera-glasses exactly what was coming next.

"Yes, that's the hero on the left, no not that man, the tall athletic-looking man. You see, he doesn't know his wife is standing behind that screen. She's going to come out in a minute, and he'll be found with the other woman on his knee. What other woman? No. She hasn't come in yet. She comes in through that French window, wearing the dinkiest mauve wrap you ever saw."

And so on and so on, till everyone within hearing distance, that is, everyone in the theatre except the leading lady's dresser, who had gone out for a pint of stout, was ready to stand up and murder that lady, and I believe that if I had seized her by the neck and shaken her it would have brought down the house!

The heart of every hardworking married man will go out to the husband who suffers at the hands of his wife from a surfeit of rice pudding.

Let us take the case of a man whose wife has given him rice pudding continuously for three days. A feeling of semi-coma having been induced by two lavish helpings, swallowed rather with a desire to annul the pangs of hunger than for any palatable qualities in the rice itself, he retires to bed early and after a sound sleep departs to business next morning.

On the return journey as he stands in a smoke-ridden, third-class carriage with eighteen passengers in it all bound for the same station, his mind naturally turns to the thoughts of the good food which awaits him. Visions of apple tart and cream come before him. The shadow of fruit salad flits across his mind.

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The lady who has seen the play before and describes it in a loud voice to her companion deserves to be shaken, if not actually strangled.

Hungrily he seats himself at the table after his five-mile tramp in the rain from the station. The customary formalities with regard to the hashed mutton having been safely and silently observed, he waits in a state of nervous expectancy for the next course.

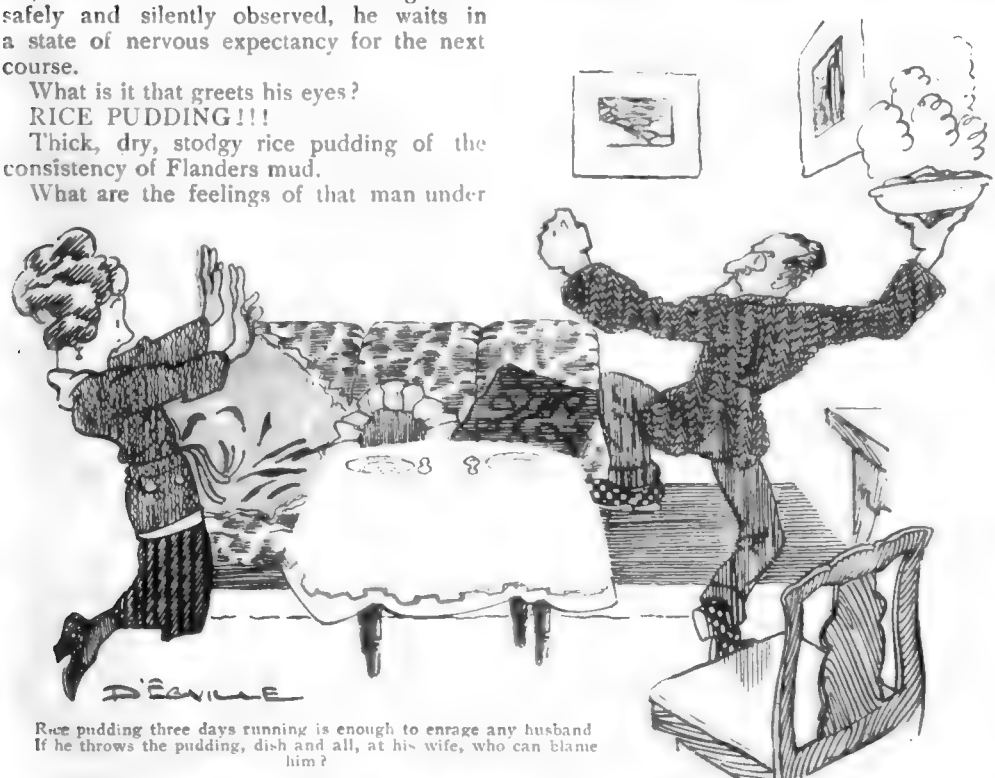
What is it that greets his eyes?

RICE PUDDING!!!

Thick, dry, stodgy rice pudding of the consistency of Flanders mud.

What are the feelings of that man under such conditions? There are no words in our language which can describe them. But there are many bloodthirsty methods by which he can ensure that the offence shall not be repeated. He can slay his wife with a fork, or push her into the fire, or even throw the pudding at her.

But *something must be done.* These things should not be allowed. If no one says a word, things will go on in just the same aggravating way. We are not half bloodthirsty enough. We must band ourselves together. We must form a Union and strike—people, hard and often. Then perhaps life will be easy and peaceful.



Rice pudding three days running is enough to enrage any husband If he throws the pudding, dish and all, at his wife, who can blame him?

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THE SWELL AND THE WELL

I

When the wine is gleaming redly
Through the fat coronas' mist,
When Mamma has gone to bye-bye,
And the girls are squeezed and kissed,
Let us drink to ffolliott Marjoribank:—
Just a ranker, just a swell,
He who saved the Colonel's daughter's
Little kitten from the well.

II.

How we feared him, how we loved him—
Colonel Bloodshire, O.B.E.,
Who had fought the Army Council
Just to keep old Ngland free;
Ten times tight in all the messes
From Karachi to Peshawar,
He could kiss the coldest maiden,
Easily, in half-an-hour.

III.

But his daughter, Gladys Gertie,
Blue of eye and gold of tress,
Might have posed in hush-hush! undies
For the illustrated press;
And her kitten was our mascot
(Soldiers know what mascots mean),
Just the regimental beastie,
Purry, furry Gurga Din

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IV

In the shadow of the banyan,
Deep and dank and dark as hell—
Doom of myriad faithless favourites—
Yawns the awful Sultan's Well.
There, at many an assignation,
Gladys Gertie's quivering charms
Heedless of his humble station
Lost themselves in ffolliott's arms

V.

Warned through spite, one day the Colonel
Burst upon them as they kissed
In his glance the light of murder,
Booming like a Bolshevist.
Gladys Gertie's timid kitten
Leapt—and leaping, found the pit;
In an eye-blink, ffolliott Marjoribanks
Dived, impetuous, after it.

VI.

Choking back a sob, her father
Through the stillness sent a yell:
"Sentry! Warn the Sergeant-Major
There's a blighter down the well!"
Swift the Sergeant-Major bellowed,
Splendid in his martial guise:
"Hrrump! Turn out the stable-picquet—
At the double, damn your eyes!"

VII.

As they saved him, faint and gasping,
While the kitten mewed in glee,
Came an orderly, saluted,
And produced this cabled plea:
"ffolliott Marjoribanks, Buggins' Tigers:
Come and kiss me ere I die,
All forgiven and forgotten
By your sire, the Earl of Skye."

VIII.

Over the expiring Noble
Gladys Gertie fain would grieve,
But the Colonel gave his blessing,
Deftly wangled ffolliott's leave.

* * * *

Boys—a health to ffolliott Marjoribanks—
Just a ranker, just a swell,
He who saved the Colonel's daughter's
Little kitten from the well.

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"With Love to Pamela—"

By Dorothy Rose.

Illustrated by Helen McKie.

"THANK you so much, Aunt Bridget. It's a beauty—and just what I wanted."

Pamela Dawn held up the knitted jumper with gratitude on her lips and a plea to the Recording Angel for forgiveness at her heart.

"I always think red is such a cheerful colour." Aunt Bridget, grey-haired, and plump as a partridge, smoothed the cap and scarf which, with the jumper, comprised her Christmas present to her niece, with complacent fingers.

"Yes." Pamela repressed a shudder. She did not underrate red as a colour—for such things as poppies and railway porters' ties it had undoubted advantages—but against her flaming hair—Pamela's hair was red as a June sunset—well, it would send Nigel into a raving delirium. Nigel was her *fiancé*, an artist to his finger-tips, and had been known to refuse salad because the red of the beetroot clashed with that of the tomato. The thought of his horror brought a smile to her lips.

Aunt Bridget mistook it for one of gratification, and chirped on blithely.

"I had such a bother to get a really bright scarlet," she said. "Five shops I went to; they were quite rude in one because I wanted to try the colour against the pillar-box outside. But I don't mind a bit now you are so pleased, my dear."

"It was perfectly sweet of you to take so much trouble." Pamela's creamy cheeks

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flushed guiltily. Not for the world would she hurt her Aunt's feelings when the dear soul had torn herself from her beloved London flat to keep her company at Christmas while the girl friend with whom she shared her cottage in Bucks, was away on a visit. Pamela wrote stories, and sold them too, as a glance round the artistically furnished room with its old oak furniture and settee piled with downy cushions showed.

"Try the jumper on, dear." Aunt Bridget held it out invitingly. "I've made seven sets altogether—one for each of my nieces; there was a yellow, and a jade-green, and a powder blue, but I must say I like the red best. It's so cosy for winter."

Pamela pulled off the white sweater she was wearing and accepted the scarlet garment with the chastened air of one invited to try on a shroud. It fitted perfectly; it was beautifully knitted; if *only* it had not been red!

Aunt Bridget saw nothing amiss. She fluttered round emitting little coos of delight, while her niece wondered how soon she could decently spill ink on it and send it away to be dyed. In the midst of her meditations the copper kettle on the hob boiled over and the meeting adjourned for tea.

Aunt Bridget was deep in her third cup of tea and a heated diatribe against all published directions for knitting jumpers, past, present and to come, when the door opened and a tall, tweed-clad figure appeared in the doorway. Nigel Thame had the thin brown face, the shock of dark hair and brooding eyes that go with easels and crimson lake. He had a flashing smile which froze suddenly as his gaze fell on Pamela. She had seen that look once before when she had leant her head against a Turkey twill cushion in the punt. She rose hastily.

"What in the world——"

"Just in time for tea," she said, "and to sample Aunt Bridget's Swiss roll." Her suède-shod foot kicked his warningly under cover of the table as they sat down. With averted eyes he accepted a cup of tea.

"Fine stuff, this!" he murmured, his gaze riveted on a jade green knitting-bag as the surest antidote to seeing red.

"I'm glad you like it." The old lady bridled. "I made it myself, two long rolls, and packed them one in each sleeve of Pamela's jumper to keep them in shape. What do you think of it? Isn't it pretty?"

"Very pretty!"

Pamela suppressed a violent desire to giggle as she beheld his discomfiture. Her hazel eyes danced mischievously as she said:

"It'll be just the thing for golfing. We're going round to-morrow, aren't we? You promised to take me, you know."

Nigel's scowl was distinctly unflattering.

Pamela, watching him out of the tail of her eye, saw he was following them up with an elderly and retired stockbroker. [Page 128, col. 1]

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She was just about to wrap up the jumper when . . . Nigel walked in, bearing an enormous bunch of flowers which he almost pushed into Aunt Bridget's welcoming arms. [*Page* 129, *col.* 2.]

He put down his cup and squared his shoulders.

"I came to fetch you to see my new picture, 'The Sunset Gleam,' that moorland thing you liked so much—it's just come from the frame-makers. I've got to be back by six. David Garton is looking in about that setter pup he wants to buy." His mouth hardened; Garton was a gentleman farmer, slow, shrewd, and honest; Nigel despised him for a clod, and suspected him because of his sincere admiration for Pamela.

"I'll come at once." Pamela rose; the atmosphere was getting too strained to be pleasant. "You don't mind, Auntie?"

"No, my dear; be off at once. Put on your cap and scarf. You'll be quite warm enough."

"Better get a coat." Nigel's voice was brusque and commanding. Pamela's lips set defiantly.

"I'll go as I am," she said, and proceeded to arrange the scarlet cap on her burnished red hair with every appearance of satisfaction.

Directly they reached the garden Nigel turned on her.

"What in heaven's name induced you to put on those appalling things?" he demanded. "Is the old lady colour blind? Why didn't you tell her you'd rather die than wear those scarlet atrocities?"

"Because I wouldn't," answered Pamela with a touch of asperity. "I don't want to die just yet. I know that saints are reputed to be clothed in spotless white, but I may not be graded as a saint, and besides, that arrangement may not hold good now that laundry charges are so excessive."

"Don't be flippant, Pam. I thought you had a little artistic sense."

They were walking through the village towards the rambling, white-walled house where Nigel lived and painted the landscapes that had at thirty-three brought him a comfortable degree of fame and fortune.

"I have—and a little gratitude too," returned Pamela warmly. "If I don't wear the jumper Aunt Bridget will think I don't

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like it, and she's too much of a dear to have her feelings hurt."

"Oh, of course, if you're afraid of offending her!" Nigel shrugged impatiently. "Personally, I'd rather be without the Queen Anne teapot and the £100 or so she may leave you than sacrifice my artistic principles, as you are doing."

"How dare you? I may not be artistic as you interpret the word, but I'm certaintly not mercenary. Aunt Bridget hasn't any money to leave; she lives on an annuity."

Pamela's blood was up, and she stalked into the house and through to the studio with offended dignity in every line of her slim, graceful figure. She forgot her annoyance a little as she admired the picture, a beautiful study of sunset on a heath-clad moor, but the altercation had made a rift between them, and there was a touch of constraint in her manner as she inspected a new mashie Nigel had just had sent down from Town.

"You'll find time to play a round or two to-morrow?" she said, making imaginary drives.

"Provided you don't turn up in that rig-out," he said, eyeing the scarlet jumper with annihilating eye.

Up to that moment Pamela had had no intention of flaunting her new garments on the links, but Nigel's authoritative attitude put her back up.

"I shall wear exactly what I please," she announced firmly, "so it's no good your reading the Riot Act."

"I won't take you round with that appalling geranium-coloured thing on your head. You don't know how horrible you look."

Pamela drew herself up. "I object to being alluded to as if I were a particularly messy street accident," she said. "If you won't take me there are plenty of people who will—David Garton, for instance."

Nigel swore beneath his breath. "I won't have you gallivanting about with Garton or any other man," he declared. "Understand that, Pam. A nice thing when the girl a fellow's engaged to talks of going round the links with another man——"

"If that's all, I think there'd better be an end of our engagement." Pam was thoroughly roused. "I'm not going to be domineered over by any man." She pulled off her ring and laid it on the table among a litter of brushes and paint tubes. "You'd better keep it until you come to your senses and see your way to apologise."

"Don't be ridiculous, Pam!" Nigel reached for the ring, intending to force it upon Pamela, when the door opened and his elderly housekeeper announced:

"Mr. Garton."

David's square, honest face betrayed considerable embarrassment as he looked from one to the other of the two heated young people. Pamela was the first to recover her composure. She held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Garton? I was just going, but if you won't be long I'll wait, and perhaps you would see me home?"

"I should be very pleased. I only came to see Mr. Thame about the setter pup he has for sale."

"I'm not going to sell it after all." Nigel wheeled about and flung the words at his visitor with an abruptness that admitted of no questioning. His decision was the outcome of jealousy and wounded pride. Pamela stifled a smile, the in fulgent smile one might bestow on a refractory child.

"Then there's nothing to wait for." She held out a cool hand to Nigel, then turned to the bewildered Garton. "Are you ready?" she said, and moved to the door.

They walked home beneath a sky powdered with silver stars. It required only the merest hint on Pamela's part to ensure Garton's escort on the links next morning. He was not one to poach on another fellow's preserves, but, after all, Thame had been confoundedly rude, and besides Pamela *was* —Pamela.

He left her at the door, elated to a degree that made her feel rather conscience-stricken. David was a good sort, and she did not want to raise false hopes in his heart To-morrow she would explain——

She paused with her key in the door. He was coming back up the cobbled path. There was a diffident smile on his firm, patient mouth.

"I wanted to ask you—don't think it cheek—but do wear that scarlet rig-out to-morrow. It'll look splendid on the links. I *do* love cheerful colours."

II.

It was as much out of a spirit of defiance as out of deference to David's wish that Pamela went forth to the golf-links looking like first cousin to a pillar-box. Nigel was mooning sulkily about on the club-house steps. Pamela tossed him a cheerful "Good-morning!" and pursued her way with the bewildered David by her side.

"I didn't know Thame would be here," he said. "If you'd rather I faded away——"

"Not on any account. The fact is our engagement is off. Be an angel and don't ask any questions. I haven't played with

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you for ages. You used to be plus two, so I expect I'm in for a whacking."

David played an excellent game, steady and consistent, unlike Nigel, who would make a brilliant drive and then fail lamentably on the green. Pamela, watching him out of the tail of her eye, saw he was following them up with an elderly and retired stockbroker whom she recognised by the scarlet coat he invariably affected for golf.

By an unhappy coincidence, their caddie wore a red and black check muffler—apparently the combination was too much for Nigel, for he was playing execrably.

They lunched on the club-house veranda on coffee out of a Thermos and sandwiches that owed their origin to Aunt Bridget. Nigel strode by with an elaborate pretence of indifference.

"I was positive Copper Clouds would drop to 85. I'm never mistaken——" The stockbroker was chanting his little lay. Pamela's face softened. Poor old Nigel! He looked desperate enough for prussic acid. Had she been a little hasty? She felt a pang of self-reproach as his dejected figure passed out of sight.

The sun was setting as she and David went home through the quiet lanes; bars of crimson and gold slashed the grey, wintry sky to a strange beauty.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Pamela breathed in delight.

"Fine day for the cattle market tomorrow," said her companion contentedly.

She gave a little shiver. He *was* prosaic. How Nigel would have revelled in it, perhaps was even now doing so in the lonely house where she was so soon to have reigned as *châtelaine*. Her soft lips drooped; there was a shade of regret in her hazel eyes as she took her clubs from David.

The regret was still there when next day she sallied forth to the neighbouring town on Christmas shopping intent. For a long time she stood outside the window of the antique shop which held the pair of quaint brass candlesticks she had meant to buy for Nigel's studio mantelpiece. Finally she went in. If *he* could not have them, no one else should.

After all she had been partly to blame: she had always despised people who fell out over trifles—if only Nigel had been less domineering, if only he hadn't imputed mercenary motives—after all it was a matter of principle She walked into the Tulip Tea-Rooms with head held high and no sign of contrition on her small, piquant face.

With her tea and toast came renewed pangs of self-reproach and—David Garton. The place was crowded; it was inevitable he should come to her table. His boots squeaked and he wore a hideous purple and orange tie.

"May I?" He sat down and ordered an amazing meal. Pamela felt she could have borne anything rather than the eggs and bacon he was soon engulfing.

"I like a substantial tea," he explained as she nibbled an éclair, and regarded him with the detached interest one gives to the sea lions feeding at the Zoo.

"They give you heavenly cream pastries here," she said. "You had a fine day for the cattle market."

"Yes." David launched into a discussion on tractors and patent manures that left Pamela gasping. She could have cried with relief when he took out his watch and swallowing half a cup of tea at a gulp, said:

"I have an appointment at the Green Dragon at six. Will you excuse me?"

"Oh, certainly!" Pamela's attention had wandered. Her eyes were fixed on the doorway through which a tall, tweed-clad figure was emerging. David had barely turned away when Nigel swooped down upon her.

"Look here, Pam, I won't have you flirting with that fellow. You were with him on the links yesterday——"

"My dear Nigel, don't be absurd. I might as well try to flirt with the mangle as with David. Our conversation has been entirely educational. He's told me all about foot and mouth disease and when to plant mangel-wurzels and——"

"Stuff and nonsense! I tell you, Pam, this can't go on." Nigel's restless eyes met her mocking ones across the table. "I believe you only put on that red thing to annoy me, and let me tell you it was a pretty poor joke. To-day you look ripping in that blue coat. Promise never to wear the scarlet horror again, there's a dear. There are some delightful jumpers at Hankey's, a jolly Saxe blue and a black and white you'd look a peach in; do let me give you one for a Christmas present and put an end to all this tomfoolery."

"I don't take presents from men to whom I'm not engaged," said Pamela demurely. "I've been nicely brought up."

"You've got to be engaged to me again." He seized her hand, but she drew it away and began to put on her gloves. "Think it over, Pam. I'm not unreasonable. All I want is your promise never to wear those atrocious things again. After all, you *were* in the wrong——"

Almost Pamela had relented, but this masculine disclaimer of all blame roused her dying resentment.

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"Quite the contrary," she asserted stoutly. "I have a perfect right to wear what colour I please. I shouldn't dream of marrying a man who attempted to dictate to me on the subject."

"All the same you've got to." Nigel's jaw set firmly. "I shall worry you until you do. I'm coming up to-night to bring Aunt Bridget the flowers I promised her for the church decorations. I shall bring the ring with me."

"I daresay fresh air will do it good," replied Pamela pertly, "and I'm sure Aunt Bridget will be pleased to see you," with the faintest possible accent on her relative's name.

III.

That evening at supper Aunt Bridget was decidedly *distraite*. Pamela forbore to make comment when she took vinegar with her scrambled egg, but when she spread the best English butter on a slice of cake she became almost panic-stricken.

"You look worried, Auntie," said her niece blithely. "You haven't had a wire to say the pipes have burst in your flat or the cat has had heart failure, have you?"

"No, my dear." The old lady tried to smile. "I—I don't know how to tell you. The fact is, I've had a very disturbing letter from Nora." (Nora was a niece in Hampstead, a red-hot damsel with pronounced views and a tendency to break out into lentils and other modern diseases.)

"Is it eurythmics this time or has she caught pneumonia sleeping out in the onion bed?" asked Pamela with a giggle.

"No. It's the jumper——" Aunt Bridget paused, obviously discomfited.

"Doesn't the colour tone with her soul waves, or something?"

"It is the colour she is so disappointed about," owned the old lady with the relief of one who finds her path unexpectedly cleared. "I sent her a black and white set, and she says that I promised her faithfully it should be red."

"She'd look topping in red with her gipsy colouring." Pamela's hazel eyes were thoughtful. She smiled encouragingly.

"That isn't all." The old lady fumbled in a remote pocket and produced a slip of paper. "She sent this. She found it pinned on to the cap. She thinks there must have been some mistake."

Pamela took the slip held out. On it was written in her Aunt's delicate hand: "With love to Pamela." Illumination came to her. She turned to her relative eagerly.

"You mean she has got the wrong set, the one you meant for me? The red jumper was for her?"

"My dear, you don't know how sorry I am." An agitated tear dropped on Aunt Bridget's black silk frock. "I knew I'd promised someone red, but I couldn't think which of you it was—my memory isn't what it was. And the red suits you so nicely; I don't like to ask you to change."

"But I don't mind a bit." Pamela's heart leapt with relief. She had much ado to keep her joy within decent bounds. "After all, black and white *does* suit me, and if you promised Nora the red she ought to have it. A promise is a promise, and I'm sure the black and white will be just as pretty."

"It is." Aunt Bridget rose, relief visible on her plump pink face. "I'll show you. Nora sent the things back—she thought I'd made a mistake." She pulled a cardboard box from under the settee and opened it. Pamela's eyes widened with delight as a black and white jumper emerged from the wrappings. It was just like the one at Hankey's—there were a cap and scarf, too—she could have danced with joy at the thought of her deliverance. She put on the jumper with a little sigh of pure satisfaction. It showed off the ruddy gold of her hair to perfection; she had a wild desire to cram the scarlet atrocities into the fire. Instead, she offered to pack them ready for the post.

She was just about to wrap up the jumper, when, without any ceremony, Nigel walked in, bearing an enormous bunch of flowers which he almost pushed into Aunt Bridget's welcoming arms.

"So you *are* getting rid of it?" he said as the old lady trotted off to put the flowers in water.

"Not from choice," she stated firmly. "Only through stern necessity, force of circumstances, and so on," and proceeded to give a detailed explanation.

"The main point is that you will never wear the things again," declared Nigel when she had finished. "That was all I asked of you."

Pamela, perched on the arm of the settee, was absorbed in contemplation of the buckles on her shoes. "They'll be at Hampstead to-morrow," she replied enigmatically.

Nigel took her by the shoulders, and she slipped to the ground, smiling at him with dancing eyes.

"I've brought the ring," he said. "Pamela, may I put it on again?"

"I think you might as well." She flashed him a mischievous smile. "You see I've bought your Christmas present, and it would be such a pity to waste it."

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Gaudy Stuff.

By Perceval Gibbon.

Illustrated by Leo Bates.

The spring wind that puffed in brief gusts along the boulevard had more than a hint of wetness in it; the dull, chill day seemed on the point of breaking into tears. The two sleek and overcoated gentlemen who came across the roadway between the hooded taxis, each with a guardian hand to his wind-threatened hat, wasted but a moment's glance upon the barren desert of iron chairs and tables ranked before the big café.

"Here!" said Mr. Neuman—"Pony" Neuman to his intimates—with decision. "Let's get inside out o' this!"

Without waiting for his companion's reply, he thrust back the swing-door and led the way into the great interior of the café, ornate and gloomy as a chapel. There were a few customers dotted about its spaciousness, sitting forlornly behind newspapers, for the most part, and at the back a couple of idle waiters lounged limply. Mr. Neuman took it all in with a single sweep of his expert eyes, the atmosphere, the quality of the *clientèle* and the faces—particularly the faces; then, with a motion like a shrug still-born, he led the way to where a table in a corner gave them a certain privacy.

"What's yours?" he inquired, as they seated themselves upon the worn velvet settee against the wall.

"Beer," replied his guest tersely.

Mr. Neuman lifted a finger and a languid waiter floated towards them down an aisle of tables; he gave his order—his own was not for beer—and the pair of them sat back in silence till the waiter should have come and gone again.

"Well," said Mr. Neuman, when the glasses stood before them, "here's luck!"

He picked up his own tiny glass and surveyed the lights in it appreciatively before he drank. He was a shortish, stoutish man in the early years of a *débonnaire* middle age; his general effect was one of a brisk and capable good nature, a sort of accomplished and virtuous worldliness. Under his trimly-clipped moustache his mouth was tolerant and humorous; he looked—he was trained and moulded to look—like a man who feared no one, whom no decent fellow creature need fear. It was only in the eyes, in their wariness, and in a certain steely challenge of their regard, that the bland, urbane face had at moments a quality vaguely formidable.

Mr. James Smith, beside him, raised his glass despondently. "Luck!" he answered to the toast bitterly. "There isn't any such thing—not with me! However——"

He drank deeply, set down his glass and sighed.

Mr. Neuman was lighting a cigar, with the manner of being absorbed in the process. Mr. James Smith gave him a glance full of calculation.

"Honest, Pony," he broke out, "I've got to have a thousand francs, just to keep going with. I know you've had a good season, and if I was to tell you the kind of hard luck that's been treadin' on my heels an' the cruel way I've been fooled, why, Pony, old man, you'd——"

"I know," interrupted Mr. Neuman; "I'd be touched—deeply touched; but not deeper than fifty francs at the very deepest."

Mr. James Smith groaned. "Fifty!" he repeated. "The bloomin' hotel bill came to six hundred. Fifty!"

He glanced back and forth between Mr. Neuman's composed face and his glass. There were, in the general fashion of him, certain resemblances to Mr. Neuman; there was the same flavour of worldliness, the same wary and warning manner of regard. But there the likeness ended. He was a man in the early thirties, thick-set and heavy-jowled; the hand that rested on the table before him was broad and blunt-fingered. For all the elaboration of his clothes, he showed the shape and bodily texture of a labourer. One could conceive of him as dangerous, but

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never with the subtle power for harm that slumbered behind Mr. Neuman's serenity.

"Here!" he said suddenly, as though upon a quick impulse of resolution. "Will you listen if I tell you the sheer, honest truth about it? Makes me look like a fool, but—will you listen?"

Mr. Neuman hesitated. He cocked an eye to the broad window, and saw beyond it how the trees of the boulevard swayed and gesticulated in the chill wind. Within the café it was at least warm and calm; and he had infinite confidence in his power to hold on to his thousand francs.

"Why not?" he said affably. "I've got nothing else to do till dinner-time."

Mr. James Smith drank again from his glass, sighed once more, settled himself against the bald and unyielding back of the settee and delivered himself in speech.

"I told you I'd been doin' a round of the winter-sport hotels in Switzerland, didn't I?" he began. "Well, it wasn't any good; the sort they get there nowadays play bridge in the evenin's for a franc a hundred and spend the rest of their time lugeing or ski-ing or skating. So I moved over to Monte at last before it ud be too late to catch a few live ones with real money to play with."

"And instead of attending strictly to business, you took your luck and your own good money to the tables, eh?" suggested Mr. Neuman. "Is that the whole story?"

Mr. Smith shook his head. "I wish it was," he answered. "That 'ud be pretty rotten; but when I was down to the inside of a thousand, I did have the sense to stop. And right there, in my hotel, I saw a chance to pull things straight.

"I was stoppin' at the *Trois Etoiles;* I judged it was best to go an' live right where the real money lives. An' there *was* money there, too—Counts and Barons an' a real gilt-edged Prince from somewhere down by Roumania; only I suppose I haven't the right kind of style to get in the same deck with court cards o' that size. Anyway I hadn't so much as swapped a 'good mornin'' with a single one o' them. Had a way—blast 'em—of actin' as if I was a kind of ghost invisible, you know. I'd come into the hall before dinner, or into the smokin'-room, and there they'd be, gangs an' bunches of 'em; all jolly an' cheery an' callin' each other 'Bill' and 'Henri' and 'Maximilian'; but when I'd slide up with my face set to be pleasant, they'd look at me as if I wasn't there. I'd seen the kind of money they had at the Rooms—stacks of it, Pony; more money than you could dream about.

"Well it was after I got my knock-out at the tables—that was one evenin' when most of 'em was playin'—an' I'd come to the general conclusion that workin' at a trade was about my mark, that I went home to the hotel an' up to my room to think out what was best to start next. It wasn't more than ten o'clock an' the hall was pretty empty, an' as the elevator started just as I came in at the door, I crossed to the stairs and walked up rather than wait for it to come down again.

"My room was on the fourth floor, along about a mile of corridor from the stairs. There was no one in sight, and I started to walk along slow and tired-like, to my door. My shoes didn't make any sound on the red carpet, an' I was worryin' so much about my troubles that I nearly passed one of the doors on the way without noticing that it was standing a quarter-open and someone was talkin' inside. I wasn't hoping for anything, but you know how it is—a feller never likes to miss a chance!"

Mr. Neuman nodded grave approval. "You've got *some* sense, anyhow," he said.

"I pulled up short," resumed Mr. James Smith. "The door wasn't wide enough to let me see anything where I was, but the talkin' went on inside. Two women, I made out it was, and one was movin' about and jabbering and the other wasn't. The talk was in French, and that was luck; if it'd been German or Italian I couldn't have understood.

"'Very well, *cherie*,' the talkative one was sayin'. 'You'll go to the salon as usual, won't you? I'll be back in an hour or so, an' then I'll see you to bed. It's such a lovely night and I must taste the fresh air. Are you sure there's nothing you want, *chérie?*' She had a voice like a scratching hen; you know, cheerful in a kind of business like way. Then the other answered. 'I shall be all right, Julie,' she said. *Her* voice was kind of soft and—faded, like a tired person's voice. 'Did I leave my wrist-watch in the bathroom, I wonder?' says the first one then, and I heard her go rustling across the room. I leant a shoulder against the corner of the wall and got my head round and took my bearings of the room inside. I hadn't anything in mind, not even then, but I wanted a look.

"Inside the door was a sort of little hall, about the size of a telephone box, with another door at the other side of it standing wide open to the room beyond. The slice of it that I could see round the door showed one o' the tall windows with long lace curtains hangin' down, and in front of it a dressing-table with a big mirror. There were electric

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lights each side of the mirror, and sittin' before it in a chair, facin' the mirror and with her back to me, was a woman. It was the one with a soft voice, 'cos the other was still clattering round in the bathroom. And what do you think she was doing, Pony?"

"How should I know?" demanded Mr. Neuman. "*I* never spied on a lady in her bedroom. *What* was she doing — undressing?"

"No," replied Mr. James Smith, unwounded. "Or p'raps, yes! Lemme tell you! She had on an evening frock, all white with bits of pink stuck about it; and she was sittin' there in it strippin' off a scuttle-full of jewellery that wou'd fairly bring the tears into your eyes. Right across the room you could see the kind o'stuff it was! Pony, there was a diamond collar about three fingers deep that you could retire and live on for the rest of your life; an' a star thing that she took off her chest while I was watchin' that you could give away libraries with. And rings—and a bracelet—and I bet the buckles on her shoes were up to sample. Diamonds, Pony—an' not twenty feet away as I stood!"

Mr. Neuman had removed his cigar from his lips to listen to this catalogue. "Thank God I never was a thief," he said, and replaced it with a motion of impatient contempt, proudly conscious that his own claims to a livelihood were securely based upon a rare proficiency in games of chance and a memory like a card-index for blackmailable scandals.

"What of it?" said James Smith. "Every man to his own trade—that's in the Bible, isn't it? And I tell you, after trying the fashionable kid-glove business with all that crowd of aristocratic icebergs, it fairly warmed my heart to be up against the real old stuff again.

"Well, there she was, strippin' 'em off and droppin' 'em into a little drawer in the upper part of the table; an' there was me, coiled round the edges of the door for anybody to see that came along the corridor. But before I pulled out I just had to see which of that unsociable lot of mantel-ornaments she was. I leant in as far as I dared; old Scratch-and-cackle was still playin' with water-taps out o' sight, and in a minute she lifted her head and I could see her face in the mirror. Then, without a sound, I got back out o' that an' took a note o' the number of the suite.

"I walked on to the stairs again and turned and walked back in time to meet Scratch-and-cackle as she came along towards the elevator. I wanted to make sure an' I did. I'd seen the pair of 'em about the place, always together, an' I figured it out that Scratch-and-cackle was a sort of poor relation or lady-companion to the younger one. She always called her *chérie* and the other called *her* 'Julie.' She was a woman gettin' on for forty, I'd say, with a brown face wrinkled like a walnut-shell an' always dressed in black. An' now and again in the evenings I'd seen her at the tables, punting in five-franc pieces: that was her way of 'tasting the fresh air,' I guess, while *chérie* was sittin' alone at home.

"*Chérie* was Mademoiselle de Something-or other; the whole thing was so simple that I never bothered to get that name right or make any inquiries about her. Lord, an' to think that the first question I'd asked anybody about her would ha' put me right! She was a middle-sized sort of girl, and it seemed as if 'Julie' never let her go out alone. Good-lookin', too, in a pale, dreamy sort of style, with a way of sittin' starin' straight in front of her as though she was lookin' a million miles off. And if ever she spoke to one o' the others o' the crowd, they just fell over themselves to do the agreeable to her. I'm not much on women, Pony, but the notion of leavin' that poor young thing all alone with those diamonds with me goin' after them—well, I thought it was pitiful.

"I got 'em next evening. When the two of 'em came upstairs, I was outside the window on the balcony. I'd paid my bill; I didn't want to have more inquiries than I could help; my baggage was at the station; and, with luck, I counted on getting through to Paris here before the stuff was missed.

"I heard 'Julie' givin' her world-famous farmyard imitations, an' I got a glimpse through the curtain of *chérie* in her great jewel-shedding act. Then they kiss, and 'Julie' leads *chérie* through the door into the parlour of the suite, comes frisking out again and leaves. I give her time to remember anything she's left behind and come back for it, and then I come in.

"The door to the parlour was on the latch, and there was nothing to be heard from the other side of it. There wasn't much more to be heard on mine. The little drawer came open without a squeak or a jerk, and the stuff was right in it.

"It was like havin' money given to you. The dog-collar, the star, the bracelet, and half-a-dozen rings, besides a little watch that was just a crust of diamonds and some trash of that sort—I got the lot. I nearly laughed as I gathered 'em in—laughed at myself for thinkin' my luck wasn't the best in the world. I s'pose I was a bit excited for the moment; there was pretty well half-a-million francs'

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"I straightened up to stow 'em away in my pockets when the door . . . gave a little click as someone laid hold of the handle. I spun round, you bet, and there she was, lookin' straight at me."

worth o' stuff there, and I didn't have my eyes round me like I'd ought to.

"I straightened up to stow 'em away in my pockets when the door behind me—the door of the parlour where *chérie* was—gave a little click as someone laid hold of the handle. I spun round, you bet, and there she was, lookin' straight at me. I hadn't covered my face up—I wasn't workin' things that way—and I had to think quick.

"'Who—who are you, please?' she asks.

"I didn't answer, and she steps forward, calm as a queen, and puts out a hand to lay hold of me. I nearly fell over backwards with astonishment at the cheek of her."

"And you, I s'pose," said Mr. Neuman, "took her carefully by the neck an' broke it. You always were a brute, James."

"I wish I had," replied James Smith sadly. "It would ha' been easy; her neck wasn't much thicker than your arm. But instead o' that, I just swung round and brushed her off her feet, so she went down in a heap in the doorway and her head bumped against the wall. 'Out o' my way!' I said, and then I left.

"I judged the bump had knocked her out, 'cos I didn't hear any noise or bells ringing as I went down and everything was the usual way down below. But since I'd been seen, I reckoned I'd got to hurry. My baggage was at the station and I'd got my berth for Paris; but that was no use to me

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now, since the Paris train didn't leave till midnight, and all the police would have to do was call at the station and get me. I went out to the garden, got through the hedge, an' set out to walk to Nice. An' I walked fast, too. Marseilles is what I was aiming at; you can get anywhere from Marseilles.

"Well, I got there—me an' my half-million francs' worth of diamonds — and since I was done with the best society for life and didn't want to take up with the police, I put up at old Mother Fréjus' wine-shop down on the west side of the harbour. I needed quiet and comfort, and if there's anybody in France who knows her way about, it's that old she-crook down there. I wanted money, too, an' you can always get about ten per cent. of the worth of your stuff from old Mother Fréjus."

"I never heard of her," said Mr. Neuman. "I don't need to know people like that."

"I do!" retorted James Smith. "And I was bloomin' glad to see the old hag again after all I'd been through with those blue-blooded refrigerators at Monte. Worth payin' to look at, old Mother Fréjus is! It's a real wine-shop she keeps, mainly for sailors and such, and there she sits in her little pulpit-place, with her big blonde wig, and her big false teeth, and her paint and powder and scent—she's sixty if she's a day—and her necklaces and rings and brooches, which are worth a million if they're worth half a franc—which they ain't! And in all her days she never told the truth to a policeman nor a lie to a chap in distress.

"When she sees me she beckons her fat daughter-in-law to take her place, and hobbles ahead of me on her high heels to the room at the back. She shut the door and turned on me.

"'*Eh bien, mon fils?*' she croaked. She's got a voice like a saw-mill when she talks loud and like a crow when she doesn't. 'What is it this time? Murder?'

"'No,' I told her. 'It's not! Lock the door, Mother, an' I'll show you what it is.'

"And when she'd done it, I got out the stuff, tied up in a handkerchief, and poured it out on the table.

"She bent over it and put her face down as if she was goin' to smell it, poring over it. '*Tiens!*' she said—like that. '*Tiens!*'

"Presently, when she'd pawed it all over and fingered every stone of it and I'd told her how I landed it, she began to talk business. For all her paint and her wig, there was a kind of grand seriousness about her.

"'My son,' she said, 'this is a very splendid and dangerous find of yours, and it is a pity not to take it to Paris. For there, in Paris, is the great Herr Zuckerbaum, who buys everything and pays well; while here we are poor people, who do only a small business in such goods as these. But since you need money'—I'd told her about that—'this little thing—I would let you have a thousand francs for this.'

"It was the little watch she'd picked out; there was really more diamond than watch in it. I judged it was worth fifteen thousand, an' *chérie* had mos' likely paid twenty. But I let it go.

"'No bill when I leave, though,' I said.

"'Certainly not,' she said, dignified. 'A thousand francs and you are my guest.'

"Well, I stayed on in Marseilles for ten days. The weather was fine, and I was willing enough for a spell of loafing; an' Mother Fréjus got word that the police at Monte had grabbed an Italian waiter for the robbery. So after a day or two I began to spend my time an' some of the thousand francs on the Cannebiere. That's a great street. You know it?"

"No," said Mr. Neuman. "Nothing doing in my line in those commercial cities."

"There is in mine," said the narrator, smiling as though at a pleasing vision. "Those busy people down there have got real money; but I wasn't after it just then. Well, as I was tellin' you, I had a good enough time on the old street, an' one fine day I strolled across to the Hotel du Louvre to get some lunch. Fine bouillebaisse they serve there an' I knew it of old. I went in at the big door to cross the hall to wash my hands before goin' into the restaurant; there were several people standin' an' sittin' about and I cast my eye over 'em—you know the habit you get into! And then I didn't go any further!

"Because, just inside the door, sittin' in a basket-chair under a palm, there she was—*chérie!*

"I stared at her and she stared back at me for about as long as you'd take to count ten. She was just like when I'd seen her last and jolted her out of my way, except she was wearing different clothes—the same kind of still, dreamy look borin' at my face. For those few seconds she could ha' caught hold of me and squealed for help an' I couldn't ha' stopped her, but she seemed as staggered as I was, 'cos she didn't make a move. But I did! The moment I could start my heart beatin' again I was out o' that door like a ninety horse-power Jack-in-the-Box an' making tracks for Mother Fréjus.

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"It was all clear enough to me—and Mother Fréjus agreed with me—why she was there. What would a rich, fash'nable young lady like her be staying in Marseilles for at the end of the Monte season if she hadn't been fetched there to identify me—her the only living person that could! Accordin' to my reckoning, now she'd set eyes on me, the police would start goin' over the city with a fine tooth-comb.

"'Jump for Paris!' was the advice of Mother Fréjus. She judged it wouldn't be hard as the police 'ud be countin' on me in Marseilles. So that night, with the diamonds in a belt under my shirt, I jumped.

"And it looked as if Mother Fréjus was right, too. I didn't have any trouble in gettin' away. I bought two tickets, one third class and the other first; and I took my seat in a third and stayed there till the train was a couple of hours on its way. Then I picked up the suit-case I'd bought and started to make my way along the train towards where the first class sheep were penned apart from the third-class goats.

"We were slowin' down into a little station just at the time when I pushed into the corridor of the *wagon-lit* car to ask the conductor if he'd got an empty berth, and I stopped to press my nose against the window to make out where we'd got to. Near by, a little way beyond my right shoulder, the door of a compartment opened and someone stood in it. And from the inside there came a voice, speaking soft and sort o' complaining.

"'See if you can make out where we are, Julie!'

"An' the person standing in the door answered: 'Yes, yes; I will see, *chérie!*'

"Me! I nearly yelled with the fright of it. There was no mistakin' that soft, washed-out voice; I was a haunted man. I didn't argue with myself or try to pull myself together and go back and hide in the third class or anything foolish like that; I just tottered to the door and fell down the steps on to the platform, and hid in the shadow of a door to make sure she wasn't following me. An' it wasn't till the train had pulled out and I knew she was gone with it that I saw my new suit-case had gone too.

"Well, I won't bother you with the whole story how I got to Paris at last, but I had a hell of a time. I tried to make connections by takin' local trains across country, and sometimes I missed the connections by half-a-minute or half-a-day, and sometimes I took the wrong train. I went everywhere in France except the places where you can get a meal an' a drink; an' I reached here at last just four days after the train I set out on. All I'd got was less than a hundred francs, the address of a man who'd put me in touch with the big fence, Zuckerbaum, and the diamonds.

"It took me a couple o' days an' all the hundred francs to freshen up an' get fit for a deal, an' then I went an' dug up Mother Fréjus' old college friend an' showed him the stuff so's he would excite Zuckerbaum about it. An' while I was on the question I borrowed a couple of hundred from him on my prospects. He liked the stuff so much that I tried him for a thousand, but he wouldn't go that far."

"'Course he wouldn't," said Mr. Neuman briskly. "It's too much. Nobody would!"

"Some would," protested Mr. James Smith hopefully. "*He* was a Jew—nose and beard an' religion an' all—not a gentleman!"

Mr. Neuman frowned thoughtfully. James Smith continued.

"Well, he got into touch with Zuckerbaum and it was fixed that I was to go to see him and show him the stuff. He was stoppin' at the Ritz—that's the sort of style these fences keep up out of men like me that risks their lives to support 'em in the lap o' luxury—an' I was to go straight up to his room. I was to go Wednesday, yesterday, at half-past twelve, an' I promised myself faithfully that when I was done with Zuckerbaum I'd go into the restaurant an' order ham an' eggs to show what I thought of 'em.

"Accordingly, yesterday, sharp on time, to show him I'm a good business man, round I go to the Ritz. There were twelve ranks of gilt-edged automobiles standin' before the door and a reg'lar buzzin' of taxis and swells and chorus girls and fences—I s'pose—goin' in and out. I joined myself to the gay throng and pushed for the door. Someone put an arm through mine, friendly-like, and said cheerily:

"'Hullo, Jim! Who'd ha' thought o' seein' you here?"

"I turned. It was Skipper Stevens; you know—Scotland Yard's Paris man. There he was, with his cute brown face an' his little pointed beard, twinkling away at me with those eyes of his as if he'd just seen a joke an' I was the joke. I always did like Skipper Stevens.

"'Don't looked so scared, Jim,' he said. 'I don't want you for anything. Been in Berlin, haven't you?'

"It never pays to keep anything from the Skipper. 'Yes,' I said. 'Just got back.'

"He nodded. 'An' Conyers? Is he still runnin' that roulette game of his in the Taubenstrasse?'

"'Still running,' I told him. 'An' makin' a good thing out of it, too.'

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"'Remember me to him when you get back,' he said. 'Well, so long, Jim,' and he let me go."

"You were a fool," said Mr. Neuman. "Conyers hasn't been out of Paris this year and Stevens knows it. That's a very old trick."

"Oh!" James Smith stared rather blankly for a couple of moments; then he broke into an unwilling grin. "The old ferret!" he said, with reluctant admiration. "There's an old ferret for you! I might ha' *known* he was after something an' it never even crossed my mind till later when I was inside.

"That was after I'd sent up my name to Zuckerbaum. 'Take a seat in the hall, please,' said a commissionaire about seven feet high. 'M. Zuckerbaum will be disengaged in a few moments.' So off I moved to the hall, saunterin' to choose a seat, and feelin' in my pocket to make sure the packet of stuff was there.

"There were rooms opening off the hall like big alcoves, ladies' waiting-room, drawing room and all that sort of stuff, showin' across the hall like big framed pictures of all kinds of expensive furniture. I went to stroll past 'em, thinkin' of nothin' except that Zuckerbaum was said to pay the biggest price of any fence in the world. There were tales how he'd bought pictures in the Louvre before they were stolen an' looted Crown jewels and all that gaudy kind of stuff. I was easy in my mind and happy. And just then, bein' by the openin' into the ladies' writing-room, I stepped inside to glance round.

"And there—oh, you've guessed it!—there she was, sittin' just round the corner from the hall and turnin' to look at me as calm and dreamy as that night in her bedroom! The same peaceful, dim kind o' look—something saintly, an' no more scared than I am of you. Never see how a clock behaves when you break the spring of it? That's how my mind went! Instead o' ticking along at its old easy gait it fell over itself with a whirr. Skipper Stevens outside and the girl here to swear to me and the stuff itself—all but the little watch that Mother Fréjus had gathered in—done up in a neat parcel in my pocket. I judged I'd been herded into the trap just as neatly and tenderly as ever a man was.

"There were people outside the room in the hall; there wasn't a chance to do anything to her. She sat lookin' at me; I decided to be done with it.

"'Here!' I said to her, quiet as I could, my head over my shoulder to see I wasn't watched. 'Here! I've had enough of bein' nag-ridden all over France by you. If I see you again after this it'll be your last moment—see? Catch hold!' I says, and drags out the stuff and pokes it at her.

"Her lips parted like as if she was gently surprised, but she made no move to take it. A couple o' the men in the hall were comin' towards us, chatterin' together.

"'*Allons! Tenez!*' I said. 'Catch hold, will you?'

"And then—would you believe it!—she put out her hand just like she'd done in the bedroom, about a foot wide o' the packet I was holdin' out to her. She sort o' felt round in the air till she blundered up against it. Then she took hold and I let it go.

"'What is it?' she asks then.

"'What's the matter with you?' I said in French, 'pawing round as if you were blind?'

"An' Pony, before she answered, it all flashed on me. She was stone-blind!

"There hadn't been any trap or any man-hunt; she couldn't have identified me nor even sworn to the diamonds. Her way of lookin' an' all!

"I glanced round, but the men in the door were facing our way, an' it wasn't possible to grab the stuff and tear it off her. An' while I was wondering how long I dare wait for a chance that seven-foot commissionaire heaves in sight an' beckons me.

"There was nothing to do. I just turned on my heel an' walked away. But I didn't go up an' see Zuckerbaum. No!"

He ceased to speak and, taking up his glass, drank the remainder of his beer.

"Well," said Mr. Neuman, "time for me to be getting along. I've got a chap dining with me." He made to stand up, then sat back as though suddenly reminded of something. "Oh!" he said. "Yes, of course!"

Mr. James Smith watched him hungrily as he reached into his bosom and extracted a wallet of Russian leather. Within the folded bills nestled in their pockets. Mr. Neuman passed a finger-tip over their crisp edges.

"Make it a thousand, Pony," begged Mr. James Smith. "I told you the whole yarn and you see how things are with me. You got plenty there, so make it a thousand, Pony, old feller!"

Mr. Neuman, unmoved, selected a note and drew it forth.

"Can't," he said succinctly. "If I loaned you that I'd have to go blind and follow you round before you'd hand it to me back. But I can spare you this. Good-night, James!"

He laid the note on the table. It was for fifty francs.

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The Marriage Mask.

By Christine Jope-Slade.

Illustrated by MacMichael.

I.

Outside snow fell.

Inside soot fell.

From her chair midway between window and fireplace Ma Bundy could see both black flakes and white flakes. Someone would have to clean up both; the soot would be *her* job.

"We oughter have this chimney cleaned, Bun," she submitted.

"Nellie wouldn't like to take her new young man in the kitchen."

"Maybe I wasn't thinking of Nellie."

"If Jeff's going to bring home that Rogerson girl, they can't sit in the kitchen neither."

"Maybe I wasn't thinking of Jeff either—but just of *me*."

"Oh, I see."

"No, you only think you do—but you're going to before I'm through, all of you!"

Pa Bundy sat up.

"Lor', Ada!" he marvelled. "You 'ave gone off the deep end."

"I'm sick of running this boarding 'ouse for you and the kids, and being treated like a cook—and now you've got the truth. You haven't bought me, none of you! When a wife's over forty a husband thinks he's bought her, and every kid thinks he bought his mother the day he was born."

With thick, trembling fingers she ran her needle through the seventh darn in a vegetable silk stocking.

"I've a mind to be appreciated before I'm dead. How you swank—the three of you—carrying on as if you was three partners in the Ritz—and me doing all the work. I've been too 'ealthy, that's my curse. The woman who can spring a headache on the family and retire to bed has the pull. I've become a habit with the three of you. You never think of me unless you want somethink. I'm like a picture on the wall—you don't notice it till it gets crooked or fal's down."

Pa Bundy sat up—he was a little overweighted—like a punchinello trying to be grave. His upper lip had fallen in, and his hook nose came down till it seemed to trip him up as he talked.

"You've got a nice home, and you can't say you don't 'ave a cheerful time, always young folks round."

"Yes—it don't cost Nellie or Jeff nothing to bring their friends home. What happened last night when Nellie brought home those two girls from business and her new young man? It *was* fun, wasn't it? I made the rock cakes and cooked the 'addock, and the two girls and Nellie made a fuss of you. Then you all gathered round the piano and sang songs like a lot of loonies while I washed up. Nobody noticed when I went out or came in—no more than if I'd been a servant. Having all these girls dancing round may make you beam, like a woolly-haire l grand-daddie, but it means more work for me. Nellie gives me a pound a week and all her blouses and stockings to wash, and feels as if she'd bought me. I know. I could earn more than her to-morrow!"

It was then that Pa Bundy made the fatal mistake in his domestic life—showed himself a poor graduate in the difficult art of husbandry. He laughed, and from the doorway came a higher, lighter feminine echo of the same *timbre*.

"Mum, you're priceless!" said Nellie Bundy. "Can I have the latchkey, Dad?"

"You can 'ave mine," put in her mother.

Perched on either side of the absurd bridge of his punchinello nose, Pa Bundy's eyes suldenly narrowed as if they perceived something for the first time—it was actually the lifting of the marriage mask, the crazy camouflage of eternal content and gratitude which no woman dared doff until work and

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"'Look here, Ada, you can't expect us when we work 'ard—" The elderly woman, breathing heavily, shot a look at him. . . . "I was a cook when you married me,—

the era of feminine independence rendered it possible.

His woman had worn it for thirty years. He suddenly felt angry and intolerant of her without it—as if she had come down to breakfast in a low-necked blouse.

"Thanks," said the daughter lightly. "I'm going out with the Collett girls."

"Sit down," said her mother tersely. "There's all the tea things to wash up yet. Why don't you lend an 'and?"

"When I go to business all day I don't expect to come home and slave," rasped the girl nervily.

"You earn your money and have a good time," said the elder woman. "I earn mine and never have no good time. I haven't had a day off for twenty years—and I don't git a salary. It's self—self—every one of you. When I look back and think of the slaving I've done for you—and you taking it for granted—I could put my head in the gas oven. Do you ever fold up your own night-gown or make your own bed? It's 'Iron this!' 'Wash this!' all day long with you, and the same with Jeff!"

"But mothers——"

"Well, what about mothers?"

"Well—they're glad to——"

"Huh!" snorted the mother. "Are

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—i'm a cook now—and a washerwoman—and a dressmaker—and a nurse—and a blooming everything without salary and without thanks."

they?" She paused. "Happen you haven't thought much about the mother side of the question. You think you're one up on me. Half the time you *are*. I've asked for ten years to have that stove I use every day bricked up so's i don't mean my scratching down the holes with my bare hands to get the clinkers up, and you got your pa to plank down the money for a piano on the instalment plan easy as 'easy. You're one up on me all right. You all are. I weigh eleven stone and won't see fifty again; no man won't want me, and I haven't any cash of my own, so I don't count. I haven't had a new hat this year, and the last thing your pa bought was that peppermint-looking sofa cushion you had to have 'cause they have them in the business."

The door opened and Jeff Bundy peered in, his Homburg in his hand.

"Good lor', Ma! Where's supper?"

"I haven't cooked it."

"I say—what bilge! I *told* you I wanted it early. And I say, hasn't the washing come yet?"

"No."

"You always go round and fetch it if it isn't here by five. I haven't a single clean collar in my drawer."

"Why should I fetch it?"

"Well, of all the ripe old questions!"

"Look here, Ada, you can't expect us when we work 'ard——"

The elderly woman, breathing heavily, shot a look at him.

"This is the first time I've sat down since seven this morning," she crisped. "I've never been taken serious—I've just bin there. I'm going to be took serious now. I was a cook when you married me. I'm a cook now—and a washerwoman—and a dressmaker—and a nurse—and a blooming everything without salary and without thanks. You all throw the money you earn at me. When you're out of a job we don't hear anything about it, but you live at home just the same. As for you, Dad, I've had you kicking about the house ever since that contract job with Simpson's was up two months ago—and I'm getting sick of it! I've got a bit of bone running up and down my back, I 'ave! I've got a job at a hundred a year—an' I'm going. I'm going to 'ave a bit of a rest and a day off and a penny or two in my pocket for the first time for twenty years. I've got a job as cook in a house where they keep five."

II.

There was no moving her; they appealed by turns to her maternal instinct, to her

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better nature, to her hatred of neighbours' gossip, to her pride as a housewife.

"You can tell them I've gone to see my aunt in Cornwall—and it'll be a joy to sit in a clean kitchen again."

To her sister at Epping she was more explicit.

"Young women are sticking up for themselves everywhere, and a young wife wants the blooming earth before she settles down. Why shouldn't an old wife?"

"Then what are you crying about?"

"I hate leaving them. How I shall stick it I don't know. Bun's hunting for a job. He don't know I know it. He can earn his pound a day easy as ea-y, but he was getting slack—he and Jeff. It's no good waiting till you're dead to be appreciated. Then that widder woman upstairs—the one who showed you that sloppy picture with the side-whiskers—she and Ann Harvey always pitying me for a softie. When Loo Porritt's husband put her in a new range just because the other drawed hard—that finished me!"

The marriage mask was off—revealing intolerance of intolerable conditions.

"Every woman has to be her own trades union in marriage," said Mrs. Bundy, with a flash of insight. "I—we was the twenty-fifth couple at a registrar's on a Bank Holiday. But it don't matter what day you take the plunge, it's always starting work on a holiday with marriage—that's just what marriage is."

Her first Sunday out Mrs. Bundy came home in a new slate-grey alpaca and a hat that flaunted a royally red rose.

Nellie, to account for her absence, had transferred the aunt from Cornwall to Twickenham, had afflicted her with consumption and appointed her mother as nurse.

Mrs. Bundy held a positive reception—as guardian of the unknown sick she discovered herself a personality; there was a festive air about the room, too, supplied by crinkled red, white, and blue paper on the kitchen shelves, and red chrysanthemums in the parlour.

The family was anxiously subservient; yesterday's clinkers had been merely shoved under the grate, and the artificial palm was a tangle of spider's web.

She refrained from comment and retained her aloof, detached air until it was time for her to return to "auntie."

Pa Bundy walked back with her. Outside the back entrance, with his eyes glued to her flaunting red rose, he said:

"When's yer night out, Ada?"

"Thursday."

"I'll call round. What about the Palladium and a bite of something?"

"Well, I don't mind," assented Mrs. Bundy.

This was the first of a series of jaunts—picture houses, 'bus rides, Madame Tussaud's. Sometimes she forgot the punchinello silhouette of the little man beside her, the hooky curve of his nose; he was again the eager-eyed, eager-hearted young artisan who had come courting her when Queen Victoria was on the throne and women's trains farmed a million microbes from every road.

She was unutterably home-sick, but the time for giving in was not yet.

With a fierce feminine *esprit de corps* Nellie strove, before and after business hours, to keep the home fires burning and this week's dust from encroaching too violently on last week's.

It was an unequal contest.

Christmas drew near and Ma's employers went away; they had been liberal in the hope of retaining an excellent cook. As the house was overstaffed, Ada found herself with many hours of liberty—the pink silk jumper she was crocheting for Nellie filled only too few of them.

She began to think yearningly of her neglected home, deserted from nine till six-thirty.

Couldn't she put in some secret spring-cleaning there—even if it were only cupboards and things out of sight? Nellie had the vaguest idea of how dirt accumulated; she wouldn't be unduly surprised to find things clean.

There was a pathetic, uncomplaining wistfulness about the family that was getting on her nerves; the hole in the range had been filled up, the position of the gas-bracket in the scullery altered, dozens of little wishes and devices that she had expressed ever since they had been in the house were being seen to.

Chiefly Bun worried her. As the shops became decked for Christmas, his curved, brightly-coloured little face assumed the pinched pathos of the orphan child at the family party.

"You'll spend Christmas day with us, Ada?" he probed huskily.

"Yes, there won't be no one at home—we're all going out," she told him with forced cheeriness.

"Need you call it home?" he asked.

She began to go home in the mornings secretly, and slake the thirst of her housewifely soul with secret fierce onslaughts on dark corners and cupboards with broom and scrubbing brush. She would go home and

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sit with them in the evenings, remote and affable in her grey alpaca, and say:

"I shan't be able to do this when my lady comes back. How clean and neat everything looks, Nellie dear."

To Nellie Pa Bundy said when she had gone, with sudden ungrateful savagery:

"Need you keep the place so damn' spick and span?"

"Spick and span!" echoed Nellie wearily. "You'd make a cat laugh, Dad."

"Well, it seems to satisfy your mother."

To his wife Bundy said a few days later:

"I've got a woman coming for a few hours every day."

"When?"

"Afternoons. She's got her own work in the mornings—place is getting filthy."

"I hadn't noticed!" answered his wife, her face flaming.

After that her mornings were given to ardent work in her own home; as reparation she made wonderful lardy cakes, dripping cakes and buns for her fellow servants in the afternoons—but the cleaning of the Augean stables was a mild pastime compared to coping with her own abode. It grew dirtier daily.

Ada Bundy flung open the door and the women eyed each other through clouds of dust. "You 'eathen!" gasped Ada Bundy. "Don't my husband pay you to keep his place clean?" [*Page* 142, *col.* 2.]

Irritation turned to amazement, amazement to a fury of energy.

Once she arrived so early in the morning she nearly collided with Jeff going to business; she rarely left before one, and all the time her energies were bent on cleaning, polishing, scrubbing—sometimes tears of rage rolled down her cheeks as she worked.

She hated the unknown daily woman with a fierce, consuming hatred.

She could have rolled her in treacle and hung her over an ants' nest.

In the evening she would sit in a room she had left immaculate that morning, now full of dust and dirt, shivering with weariness and

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furious amazement; and Bundy would say, with that queer look of childish cunning and pathos to which his face had become the home:

"The daily woman's not so bad."

And Ada Bundy would gaze at her household gods with cold black hate in her heart and agree with him.

But she wouldn't give in just yet.

The marriage mask no longer fitted—she had to make sure that they would pay due deference to what had lain hidden beneath it for thirty years—for unmasked the wife and mother is infinitely more powerful, yet infinitely more helpless.

Where did all the dirt come from? Where could it all come from? She woke at night wrestling with the problem.

At noon she left a house as immaculate as the housewives' page of a weekly paper would have you believe it is possible to keep one, and in the evening she would return to a home such as a new wife lately in business might be guilty of.

What black magic happened in the interval?

She wished when she left home she had relinquished the door key and thus lost the right of entry, so maddening was the result.

Then, the morning of Christmas Eve, a dozen things served to make her late, a scald of the housemaid's, the discovery that forty pounds of jam were beginning to ferment.

She put on her old check apron and set to work.

She chose Nellie's room for her ministration.

A thin yellow fog, almost like the reflection of dull electric light, filtered into the room where Ada Bundy worked with tight set lips and tight shut door.

Then, on the other side of the door, in the sitting-room as yet untouched, she heard sounds.

At the same moment a muffled clock struck two.

It was the daily woman at her sinister job of creating havoc and dirt and desolation.

Her eyes gleaming, her bosom heaving, Ada Bundy knelt down and looked through the keyhole.

A stranger woman was at her weird rites.

First she poked the dead fire so that the ashes flew all over the room—she watched them fly with much the same interest as a witch might have watched the evaporation of her cauldron fumes; then she broke a few sticks, tore up a few bits of paper and piled them on the half-raked out fire. Then she took up the mats and shook them violently; lastly she brought in the outer mat from the hall door and shook that too.

Ada Bundy flung open the door and the women eyed each other through clouds of dust.

"You 'eathen!" gasped Ada Bundy. "Don't my husband pay you to keep his place clean?"

"Nope," stared the daily woman. "He don't. He pays me to keep it mucky—and it's the 'ardest job I've ever 'ad. I'd sooner keep earthworms from growin' in a canary's sand."

"You mean——" Ada Bundy paused.

"You should stay and see arter 'im," cautioned the help with asperity; "because he ain't in a lunatic asylum that don't mean he's normal."

"'I pays you to make it dirty,'" he sez; 'just flick the dirt about and keep it from looking like 'ome.' I couldn't find no dust—if it 'adn't been for that mat outside what everybody wipes their feet on I'd 'ave chucked the job the first day."

She paused: "Nursing a sick aunt, ain't yer?"

"Yes," said Ada Bundy.

"Well, there's a job nearer 'ome."

Ada Bundy smiled the smile of perfect understanding.

"The aunt's dead," she said tersely. "I've come 'ome for good." She paused. "Are you paid by the day or week?"

"Week."

"Well—I shan't need you next week. Now, you can just clean up that mess."

Hurrying, she went to the drawer in her own room and took out a clean check apron.

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The Red Fisher.

By Owen Oliver.

Illustrated by John E. Sutcliffe.

THE Red Fisher knows the bait for everyone. He took me with Robert Carr.

You'll think that's only a figure of speech, but it isn't. There is a full bottle of strong sleeping-draught in my bedroom, marked off into sixteen tiny portions by lines of glass. I would take the whole bottleful if I could escape a picture of the Red Fisher waiting to pull me out of the river of sleep.

The Devil may be only a superstition that ages haven't quite wiped off the slate of heredity, but the picture is a fact. You can see it on the walls of Nugent's Gallery.

"874. The Red Fisher."

It shows up best if you stand just beside the left-hand seat of the settee. You get the full malignity of the grin then. I stood just there when my duel with conscience began. I suppose I am not ultra-modern. I have a conscience.

It was on a rainy Friday afternoon three years ago, and I had a dull hour to kill. I passed the gallery. "I may as well be bored by myself as bored by pictures," I reflected. "I can't be more bored by pictures than I am by myself," I thought fifty yards down the road. I turned back and went in.

I saw my own thoughts rather than the pictures, until I found myself staring at the devil—a very proper Mephistopheles, long, lean, sardonic, and habited in hard red. He sat upon an overhanging branch, dangling his pointed shoes above a glassy stream that came from nowhere into a green wood and ran out to nowhere again. A network bag lay upon the grass behind him, with his varied bait peeping through the meshes—a miniature of a pretty, enticing woman, and a cardinal's hat; a diploma, a seal of office, and a fat packet of bonds; a necklace of diamonds, and a president's chair. A pale young monk lay dead upon the bank, caught by a saint's aureole, and a red-faced woman captured by a wicker flask. The wine was dribbling out and staining a little white daisy purple. The Red Fisher was angling now with a pretty mannikin.

"I wonder," I thought, "what bait he'd use for me?"

I turned over temptations hopefully in my mind, but could find none strong enough to haul me to the devil's bank. I was a dull bachelor woman, I told myself impatiently, half past temptation and growing into an old maid with a hundred weaknesses and no grand vice; not warm enough to nourish a sin.

"Isn't there *anything* you'd risk the hook for, Nina?" I asked myself. "Surely you aren't quite dried-up yet?"

I looked into my secret mind as if it were a picture-book and the burly form of Robert Carr grew slowly out of the mist within; dear old Robert, manly and clever, and courteous and kind! I felt my eyes widen and my mouth open and close with a snap. I am telling the truth. I did not know before how much I liked him, though I would have said any day and anywhere that he was the nicest fellow in the world. Well, I *did* like him, in a perfectly proper way; liked him very much. What of it?

"My dear devil!" I said contemptuously. "You've chosen the wrong fly! I don't nibble at the husband of my friend. And besides, he doesn't want me."

I gasped again at the self-betrayal of the last words, reddened, and then turned very pale. I could see my face in a little mirror. I have a conscience, as I have said. There were many virtues that I had no great care for, but I cherished an idea of myself as loyal to my friends. Margaret was a cat of a woman and I was another, but we were pals; had been all our lives. "Not *her* husband," I said, even in the dark depths of my mind; but the heart is deeper. That said I was lost if the Fisherman won over Robert Carr to help him angle for me. I must fly from temptation or risk the consequences.

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"Well," I decided deliberately, "I take the risk, if there is one. There isn't! Robert loves his wife, if she doesn't care much for him. She is ten times better-looking than I. He likes pink, smiling, young prettiness. He'd never want this p le, old, snappish thing, except perhaps as a friend. Poor boy! He needs someone to comfort h'm. Fish away, my dear devil! I'll risk all I have and am to be a help to dear old Bob."

I went to their house on the Saturday afternoon, as I generally did. Margaret was animated. Robert was gloomy. She was going to drag him away to the seaside on Monday, and his roots are in his business and his study.

"It's all very well for you," he grumbled. "You'll have drives and excursions and dances and whist-drives, and two or three admirers hanging round. I shall have nothing to do but potter along the beach. I hate pottering. I'd rather stay in Town."

"Don't potter," I advised. "Take to golf or something. Get an admirer yourself, if Margie doesn't behave."

"That introduces a subject for me!" Margaret cried gaily. "Come with us, Nina, and take him off my hands for a fortnight. You can teach him golf, if you like, or sailing. He'd love that. Nag him and wake him up! Wanted an experienced lady with a stimulating tongue to take entire charge of a dull infant! You just fit!"

"Poor Robert!" I said. "My sailing's all right, and my tongue; but I don't know golf. Don't be afraid, my dear chap; I won't add to your troubles."

"I'm sure you won't," he said heartily. "Come and teach me sailing, Nina. I'd like it."

I went.

There aren't too many red-letter days in my calendar, but there wasn't a black one in that fortnight. Margaret spent the days on the pier, showing off her new hats and dresses and smiling at competing cavaliers. She always had a train of adorers. Oh, she was a *pretty* woman! She danced all the evenings.

Robert and I sailed away the days in a twenty-foot half-decked boat. My father taught me sailing when I was a child; now I taught Robert. In the evenings we went to concerts and entertainments, or walked—generally walked. Oh, those walks! I never knew before that the sky was so full of stars!

It did not occur to Robert to make love to me, and I did not try—I swear it—to put the notion in his mind. I just wanted him to be happier, and I made him. I was a fine pal, he told me as we scudded back before the wind on the last afternoon. I remember the salt spray on my lips, and my hair blowing loose, and the adoration in my heart when I looked at him.

"You're a fine pal, Nina," he said.

"I'm glad," I said. "I like to be your pal, Bob."

"Thank you," he acknowledged, "dear old girl! Lord knows, I need one. Margaret——" He set his lips. "Our tastes differ a good deal," he concluded.

"It's just that," I consoled him. "Margaret is all right in her way. I am fond of her you know." That was fairly true. "There's nothing *in* her little flirtations, Bob." That had a large element of truth. She skated on thin ice, but she did not go in. "She's fond of you, really." That was quite true. "I think, Bob, if you spoke to her frankly, if you said: 'I'd like us to get on better, Maggy. I much prefer you to anyone else, and——'"

That was my supreme effort. God knows what it cost me! I would have gone through with it, and tried to reconcile them, if he had not interrupted me, but he held up his hand.

"I don't, Nina," he said very, very quietly. "I haven't for several years. Don't ask me questions."

"No," I said faintly, "I won't."

I opened my mouth a little to catch the salt wind. It seemed to me that there was not air enough in the whole world, and that my heart was too small to hold my hot blood. I loved him as a mother loves her little child just then, this big, strong man. Our love should be silent and pure I vowed; and everything else in my life should be set aside to do little things to brighten him.

"We won't talk about troubles," I said cheerfully. "Let's make the best of the comfort we have—a grand pal to sail a good boat! I'll put her nose into the waves and make her splash, and we'll get drenched and laugh like kids."

Oh! That was a red-letter afternoon. We went back to Town that evening.

"Come in often, Nina," he begged when we parted at the station. "Good luck, old girl!"

Things went badly between him and Margaret during the next year. He was too civil to her, and she was not civil enough to him. They had a bad quarrel, cold on his side and hot on hers, and decided to occupy separate rooms. Margaret told me herself.

"As he does not want me," she said, "the inference is obvious."

"That he thinks you want another man?" I answered sharply.

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"No one in particular,' she rejoined pettishly. "I like dozens. That's my safety! He likes very few women. That's his danger. If you only like one you like too much."

"If," I cried scornfully. "It's like you to try to put the blame on *him!* He's worth a dozen of either of us You're a silly, suspicious woman. Are you working round to object to me being friendly with the poor, neglected boy?"

I never had a greater insult than her look of amazement then.

"You!" she cried with her big blue eyes wide open. She has lovely soft eyes and mine are hard, beady things. "You!" She laughed. I'd have liked to take her full throat in my hands and strangle the sneer. "No, I'm not so absurd as that. You just take the place of a sister to him. You and I have been rather like sisters, Nina. Don't look hurt, dear old thing. I didn't mean that a man couldn't like you very much, only—you are far too good a pal to me to let him flirt with you."

"I am his pal also," I said steadily; "and since you mention the matter to me, I don't blame him nearly so much as I blame you."

"I don't either," she agreed, "but still—I'm a cat, of course; but I only wanted just to have a little amusement. If he'd pulled me up as he ought to have done I'd have given in after a kick or two, and—I suppose you know that I like him?"

"I suppose so," I answered; "but you've had a funny way of showing it."

"Well, you see—it may be only my fancy, but—three or four years ago I thought that he cooled to me. If he'd just been angry or nasty and we'd quarrelled, I'd have made it up very nicely; but he didn't seem to want to make it up, and I thought—you'll laugh—but I *did* think that there must be someone else. I thought so the other day when we met—someone. I watched him talking to her. I am sure *she* likes *him*, anyhow."

"Who?" I demanded. My voice was more anxious than I liked.

"Joyce Reed," Margaret told me.

"Joyce!" My laugh was very genuine. "You donkey! Why she's about twenty-four, and he's getting on to forty. He always likes kids, but he's quite fraternal to them. He doesn't even see her more than once in six months."

"Doesn't he? You know more of his doings than I do."

"More shame to you!" I said vigorously. "Well, I don't think his doings concern baby Joyce. Robert's tastes are mature. I don't suppose his doings concern any woman; but he has not broached the subject to me."

"He might if you led him on a little?" she suggested, with one of the pretty, side-way looks that trap a man and warn a woman.

I rose to go.

"Margaret," I said sternly, "you disgust me. Robert is my friend. His friendship is a precious thing to me. I don't mind saying that to you, or on the housetops! He is absolutely the best man I know. If you dream that I would win his confidence and betray him to you you are greatly mistaken. Look here! If I found him out I shouldn't tell you. That's flat!"

"No," she agreed. "I don't believe you would. You're a stiff creature! But you'd influence *him*. You're a better sort than you know. Influence him a little in this direction, Nina." She held out her grand arms. "He's my husband, and"—the red rushed over her handsome face and superb neck, even over her rounded arms—"*I want him!*"

"Umph!" I said. My voice was indifferent enough, but my heart was knocking to and fro and screaming that she should not win him back from me.

"I know what you're thinking," she charged me, "but you're wrong. I don't want him to plague. I'd be good to him—now. Try, Nina. If you could put the idea of making it up into his head? It's natural to him to do the kind thing if he thinks of it. You could say it's a pity we squabble, because I *can* be nice, and—you could say you know I like him. Will you, Nina?"

"I'll try," I answered.

That was a lie. I did not try to lead him back to her. I tried to alienate him, warned him against being fooled by her.

Margaret's affectionate mood soon passed. I knew it would! Their dissension became sharper and more in evidence; they never went out together, and when ever one dined at home the other dined with friends, or "in Town." It was generally she who was out; but Robert was "at the club" more than he used to be. He was abstracted and silent very often when I talked to him. I had always been able to rally him into interest before.

I spoke to him frankly one evening when Margaret had gone out and I had dropped in.

"Bob," I said, "you look upon me as a pretty trusty friend, I think?"

"Indeed," he assured me, "I do. I'd trust you blind, Nina."

"There's something on your mind, I know. Would it help you to tell a pal?"

He leant back in his chair and opened his cigarette-case.

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"No," I commanded, "a cigar! One of those you keep for special occasions. It will unruffle you. I'll get you one. Give me the key of the cabinet." I took the key from him and fetched him one of his "extravagances," as he called them.

"There, old pal; the precious red band. See! Now you can talk."

"Good old Nina! How you know my ways and study me. You see, there are things that one can't talk about; things that concern other people."

I nodded.

"Talk about a man you know," I suggested, "and leave out people's names; and I'll advise you in the abstract."

He shook his head.

"I'm no good at acting, Nina. I'm talking about myself. Eight years ago I married Margaret. Nobody blamed us. We appeared to be just suited. We didn't really suit, Nina; not even on the honeymoon, I remember—Bah! I'm gossiping like an old lady. Well, wherever the fault lay, we drifted away from each other. Possibly she didn't mean much harm by her flirtations, but they were sufficiently in evidence to humiliate her husband. I was too proud to own my hurt. I just gritted it out, till I didn't care a hang. Well, not much. Anyhow, I was very lonely for a long time, and then I found—a very wonderful woman. Oh! A very wonderful woman!"

"You thought her so," I said. I sighed.

"She was, and is. There has never been a word of love between me and her, Nina; but we know."

"Both of you?" I said unsteadily.

"Both of us," he said unhesitatingly. "Yes. Sometimes we have been near to the word, but we have paused in time. It is not my strength that keeps us as we are, but the strength that I get from her; my reverence for her goodness and daintiness. She is above all women. She——"

"Hush!" I said. "We are not talking of her, but of you. This is your story, which you are telling to your *friend*—so truly your friend, Bob, you know."

"I know. I don't want to sink in your estimation, friend. I will tell you how I looked at it. There is no wrong to Margaret, I said. For years she has not wanted me; and *she* has not scrupled to flirt with others. I do not say that she has been untrue to her marriage vow, as the world estimates it. I do not know."

"*I* do not know," I said in a faint whisper.

If I did a shameful, damnable thing from first to last it was when I said that. Margaret was an honest woman then. I had not the slightest doubt of it.

"There can be no wrong to myself. For love of—her whom I love—I am a better man and our love is innocent and pure. The question was about the girl. I kept out of her way for some years, for fear that her love for me—I knew it—would spoil her life. Then I saw that she meant to die a maid for love of me. Why should not she as well as I have the comfort of friendship? I argued. Well, we have it. I think life is just the hours that we spend together. . . . Is it very wrong, Nina?"

"Only unwise," I said, still very faintly. "Is that all?"

"No." He put his cigar to his lips, but I saw that it had gone out.

"I'll light it," I offered.

It was growing dusk and, when the match flared up, I seemed to see the Red Fisher in it, laughing triumphantly in the flare.

"Hook me, then!" my mind told him fiercely. I expected Robert's arm to go round me, as I stood beside his chair, offering him the light. I held his wrist with one hand to steady the cigar. The touch that I hungered and thirsted for did not come.

"Thank you, Nina. You spoil me. The devil of it is that Margaret has taken one of her turns—turned towards me as she might to a new flame. She wants to make it up. Nina, I don't want *her*. I should not want her, if the other woman weren't in the world. *Don't* tell me it's my duty to make it up! That's what I have on my mind, what I wanted to ask you, my good friend."

There was a long, long silence. I sat with my chin on my hand, staring into the fire; made a picture there with the black and gold and amber and the grey smoke. The Red Fisher dangled his feet merrily in the flames; set his teeth, and forgot to smile as he placed me at the end of the line; wondered—so did I!—if I were firmly hooked. I swam round and round, I thought, till the water ran in fast ripples that I could hear. *Hiss—s—s—s—s*. That was only the sound of the flames. *Flap—flap—flap*. Only the puffs of the jets of coal-gas catching fire. I put my hands on the arms of the chair. One more tightening of my nerves and I should go to Robert. I paused only for the right words—just his name. I would say "Bob, dear!" I drew a breath, half rose—and heard Margaret's voice in the hall. She had come home. What a magnificent woman she looked when she switched on the light at the door!

"I had a fancy to be domestic to-night,"

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I drew a breath, half rose—and heard Margaret's voice in the hall. She had come home. What a magnificent woman she looked when she switched on the light at the door!

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she said laughingly, "but I suppose you are going out, Bob?"

"I am going out," he told her, and rose.

They looked hard at each other. Several times I thought they were going to speak, but they did not. She gasped when he had gone, clenched her hands. Presently she clutched my arm.

"He's going to *her!*" she hissed.

"Don't be a fool," I said.

"He wants to get rid of me," she said in my ear. "He thinks—— Nina, he's having me watched!"

"I would, if I were he," I told her. That was not true; I had no suspicion of her. "But he isn't. I should think it's your conscience, if you have one."

"Until to-night I had," she told me furiously. "Now it's gone. I came home to try and put things right. I was ready to *humble* myself to him." She laughed wildly. "You side with him, of course. I dare say you'd try to marry him, if I were gone."

"Margaret!"

"I didn't mean it, Nina. Don't you turn on me. You're the only pal I have. Women don't like me. Well, men do! Can't you help me, Nina? I tell you I'm desperate."

"What do you mean?" I clutched her arm.

"Why should I stay with a man who despises me when another adores me? I've been a good woman till now, but——!"

"Who is it?"

"I didn't say it was anyone. Don't stare at me like that! You look like a—a devil! If I did, he'd have driven me to it. He's a cold brute. He——"

"I won't listen to abuse of him," I said.

"Don't go," she pleaded. "I want help. I—I——"

I closed the door upon her.

I called at Robert's office the next morning and saw him alone.

"Bob," I said, "I've got to be disloyal to one friend or another. You have to come first. You are—of all friends—dearest to me. I can't see your life spoilt by a tie that *you* honour, and *she*—— If I were you I should have Margaret watched. Not a word! It doesn't bear discussion."

"Nina?" he said hoarsely. "You know that she——?"

"Have her watched," I said sharply. Then I turned and walked out. I went away for a month. When I came back he had taken proceedings for his divorce.

I don't know what kink in my character took me to the court. He had kept me out of it, of course, and I needn't have gone. Margaret was foolish enough to fight the case. I don't think she expected to save herself—only wanted to say what she said in the box.

"I have done things that lay me open to suspicion," she said, looking like a beautiful, pale statue, "things that I should not have done. I deserved to lose my husband's affection, but I tried to win it back. He did not want me back. That made me desperate, and I——"

"You have not answered my plain question, madam," Robert's counsel interrupted. He repeated the question—I need not name it—and she fainted in the box. The judge suggested to her counsel that it was a matter for his discretion whether "this painful cross-examination" should proceed when his client recovered. She did not reappear and her counsel accepted judgment against her. I sometimes wonder whether she merely let judgment go by default to give Robert his freedom. The man protested her innocence, but he married her afterwards. I do not trouble very much about Margaret even now. I did not trouble about her at all then. My brain was in a mad whirl thinking of the time when Robert would come as a free man to me. I went away to the sea, which we loved, to wait for him.

He did not come.

It was his idea of my "goodness" and "delicacy" that delayed him, I supposed. He thought that I should not wish him to speak yet. I meant him to keep that idea all our lives. I decided to go back to Town and wait patiently till we met in the usual course of friendship. He was away in the country I found. His mother told me.

"You were a friend of Margaret's," she said; "but I think you wish for Robert's happiness."

"Indeed," I said, "I do, Mrs. Carr. Believe me I was, and am, a friend of Robert too. He deserves happiness; and if it depended on *my* wish——"

I drew a deep breath, wondered whether the foolish fellow feared that I would refuse him for some scruple, because I had been Margaret's friend.

"Then," she said, "you will like to know that he has it. . . . He is staying with the Reeds. There is no engagement yet, but he and Joyce . . ."

I do not remember the rest. I found myself wiping my face with my handkerchief and feeling as if I had just "come to" at the dentist's from laughing gas.

"It is very hot," I said; "very hot. . . . I feel as if something is sticking in my throat!"

The Red Fisher knew what it was.

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HE'D HIT IT.

"What's the hardest thing about roller-skating when you're learning?" asked a hesitating young man of one rink instructor.

"The floor," answered the attendant.

POPULARITY AT ALL COSTS.

"After all," said the philosopher, "what we really struggle for in this life is the good opinion of someone else."

"That's right," declared Mr. Mobsby. "My wife and I are both terribly worried for fear our new cook won't like us."

STAYING POWER.

Two business men noticed an elderly man passing.

"That's Brown,; he works for me," said one of them

"He's an honest-looking chap," remarked the other. "Has he any staying power?"

"Indeed, he haa," replied the first. "He began at the bottom of the ladder forty years ago, and he's stayed there ever since."

A NATURAL AFFLICTION.

Two taxi-men who had had a race for priority of place on the "rank" were glaring fiercely at each other.

"An' wot's the matter with you?" demanded one.

"Nothink's the matter with me."

"You gave me a nasty look," persisted the first.

"Me? Why, you certainly 'ave a nasty look, but I didn't give it you."

THE TIME LIMIT

"Edith," he whispered, "will you marry me?"

"I don't know, Tom," she replied coyly.

"Well, when you find out," he said, rising, "send me word, will you? I shall be at Eva Gordon's until ten o'clock. If I don't hear from you by then I am going to ask her."

A PERFECT REPLICA.

Sandy and Donald met the other day and began talking about the horrible weather.

"Do ye ever remember a summer like this?" asked Donald.

"I do, indeed," answered Sandy.

"An' when was that?"

"Last winter."

NOT IN STOCK.

Phyllis was a little girl of seven, and her mother had sent her to the draper's to get a dozen linen buttons a little bigger than a sixpence.

Full of importance, Phyllis walked into the shop.

"Please give me a dozen linen buttons as big as sevenpence," she said.

AN EXPENSIVE KEEPSAKE.

One of John's best friends had died while he was away, so he called on the widow to express his sympathy.

"John and I were good pals," he said. "Isn't there something of his I could have as a memento of him?"

She raised her velvety brown eyes, which a few seconds before were wet with tears.

"How would I do?" she whispered.

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A DEEP PROBLEM.

CADDIE (to golfer who has been lifting the turf all the way round the course): "You'll be a stranger in these parts, I suppose?"

GOLFER: "Well, not exactly a stranger. I was born here and all my people are buried hereabouts."

CADDIE (as the golfer lifts another piece of turf with his driver): "I doot you'll no get deep enough with your driver; you'd better tak' your iron."

A WARNING TO HIM.

A farmer's man always went courting with a lantern on winter nights.

One evening the farmer met him going down the lane with his lantern, and asked him where he was going.

"Courtin'," was the reply.

"Courting," said the farmer, "with a lantern? I never took a lantern with me when I went courting.'

"I thought not," replied his man, "when I first saw your missis."

A PERMANENT SITUATION.

BUDGE: "I don't think that women have always been vain. You know women were made before mirrors."

FUDGE: "Yes, and they've been before them ever since."

WHY AUNT MATILDA WAS RUN IN.

"BEWARE OF THE DOG——"

FIRST TRAMP: "It's no good calling at that there house. Them people's vegetarians."

SECOND TRAMP: "I don't mind that!"

FIRST TRAMP: "Ah! but they've got a dorg wot ain't."

A DISSERTATION

My sister Joan does fancy-work,
I ought to do it, too,
And there are many other things
I really ought to do.
I ought to cook, I ought to mend,
But these are jobs I shirk;
My sister Joan does fancy-work,
But I don't fancy work.

Elsie Skeet.

THE COLOUR QUESTION.

LADY: "Bother! I've lost my handkerchief."

OBLIGING STRANGER: "Beg pardon, mum, but is this it?"

WIPED OUT.

AUNT DOROTHY: "How many Commandments are there, Tommy?"

TOMMY (glibly): "Ten."

AUNT DOROTHY: "And suppose you were to break one of them?"

TOMMY: "Then there'd be nine."

A FEAT OF MEMORY.

After a stage rehearsal an eminent actor met a youth who was giving himself airs on the strength of his first engagement in London.

"These rehearsals are a beastly fag," the young man observed, "but, thank goodness, I know my words."

"Both of them?" asked the actor.

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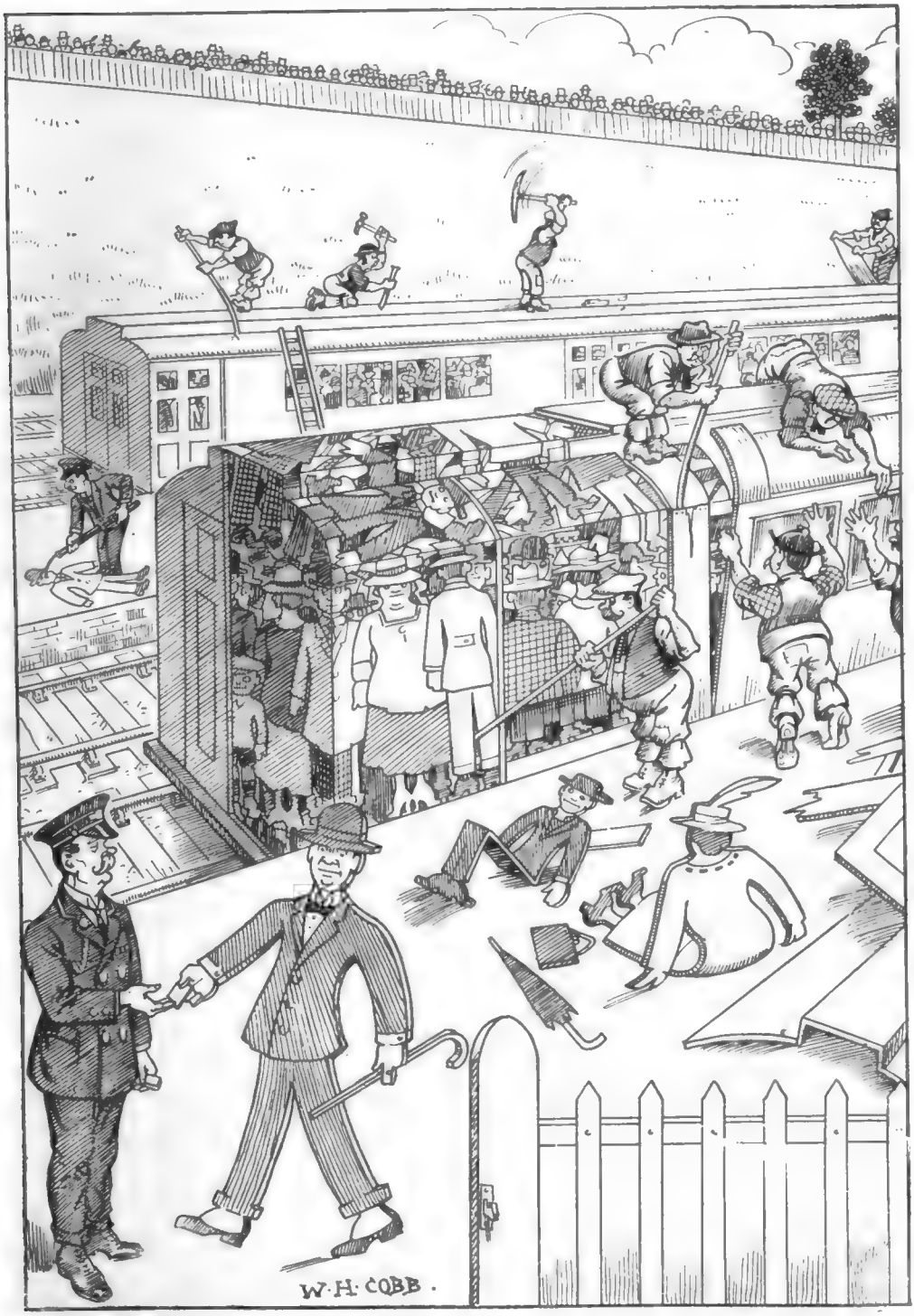
PAINLESS EXTRACTION.

Merciful Methods of Assisting Passengers to Alight from Suburban Trains during the Rush Hours.



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HAS HE FOUND THE SIXPENCE?

UNDER ESCORT.

The rivalry existing between the two local doctors was very keen, and they never lost a chance to score off one another. The other day they met in the street.

"I notice that you occasionally take patients out for a drive," said Dr. Leech.

"Yes," said Dr. Cure. "I think it is very beneficial to them."

"But, my dear sir, it isn't professional. I never do it."

"No," retorted Dr. Cure. "I notice that when your patients go driving the undertaker usually accompanies them."

O O O

LOSING HIS HEAD.

HUBBY (at breakfast): "I've got a bad head this morning."

WIFE: "I'm sorry, dear. I do hope you'll be able to shake it off."

A NASTY SLUR.

A dealer in stuffed animals, who also kept a few live creatures for sale, gave his shop-boy, who was permitted to sell the stuffed specimens, orders to call him when anyone asked for any of the living animals.

One day a gentleman called and demanded a monkey.

"One of these?" asked the boy, who was in charge. He pointed to the stuffed specimens.

"No; I want a live monkey," answered the customer.

The boy stepped to the back of the shop.

"You're wanted, sir!" he called to his master.

SLIPPERY CUSTOMERS!

A wealthy factory owner once took a wonderful country house, and set about making what he considered improvements. One of his suggestions was a fish-pond which should contain eels.

"But you can't keep eels in a pond," objected the neighbour to whom he had confided this idea. "They have to go down to the sea every year you know."

"Well, I won't have 'em," gasped the *nouveau riche*. "I always takes the missus and kids to Brighton every year, but I ain't going to take no eels."

A MARKED MAN.

There was a load of bricks on the football ground in anticipation of some reconstruction work. An aged supporter of the club came up one day, eyed the bricks, and knit his brows as if in deep thought.

When the secretary asked him what he was thinking about, he said quietly:

"Why didn't you get 'arf-bricks? They would have been much handier."

"Handier?" echoed the secretary. "Why, man, we couldn't build a pavilion with half-bricks."

"Oh, a pavilion!" sighed the old man. "I thought they were for the referee!"

BOUND TO GO THROUGH IT.

HARRY (just out of hospital): "Which ward was you in in the 'orspital? Medical or surgical?"

FREDDIE: "I dunno. Wot's the difference?"

HARRY: "In the medical you're ill when you goes in. In the surgical they makes you ill arterwards."

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The Sea Gull.

By G. B. Lancaster.

Illustrated by W. R. S. Stott.

ALL the North Pacific Coast knew him as the Sea Gull, although stray fishing villages, where breeds clustered thicker than Siwash Indians or white men, had softened it to La Mouette. There was never a wild night but the girls dreamt of him—sleek-haired, silent Indian in her tepee; sulky-faced breed with the secretive heart and the violent passions; the scattering of American or French-Canadian girls whose fathers were agents for some fur company thrusting its tentacles up through this Alaskan wilderness, or managers of saw-mills, or skippers of the little coastal boats running up from Vancouver.

North and south the Sea Gull saw them for a brief space in his ranging flights and forgot them. But they saw him and remembered. When spume flew inland before the mad winter gales, and the surf pounded the rocks until the thunder of it filled up the night; when blue lightning flickered along the inky pile of clouds and straight slivers of rain lashed the sea to spouting fury; when torn driftwood and bleached bones strewed the beaches of Baranof Island, or Takatal Bay, or Jartrey-Northlet under the pink dawn-light, and the raving wind died shuddering across a shuddering sea, Little Fawn, or Marysis, or Jeannette went about their tasks with frightened eyes and prayed their secret gods for one white-skinned, fair-faced young god, with yellow hair that streamed behind him and blue, roving eyes that rarely looked to earth long enough to see them.

Maybe the Sea Gull's ancestors had been Norsemen. He knew nor cared no more than his friends, the gulls, did. Free, daring, tameless as they, and trusting himself in his little motor-boat as implicitly to the elements, he had almost their contempt for the things of the land, and almost their skill at the fishing. And so he came to his twentieth year, standing a few inches taller and broader than most men, with a curiously fair skin which no sun nor wind could tan deeply, and a curiously clean and untouched heart. Sometimes in a saloon or gaming-house he fell among things which disturbed his primitive well-being, but he swiftly left them to plunge himself in the purifying sea-atmosphere again. Sometimes one girl, bolder than the rest, told him how half the girls on the coast would give five years of their life for a month of the Sea Gull's love. That frightened and displeased him.

"I t'ink you fool me," he would say, and get himself away, shy as the gulls themselves, to send his little motor-boat skimming the wave-crests, and call to the birds with their own wild notes as they came dipping and circling round.

And then, very nearly at the same time, two women began to interfere in the destiny of La Mouette. For near a year past Euphrasie Mars, daughter of the storekeeper at The Forks, had been the only girl on whom his hawk-eye ever lit for more than a passing glance. Euphrasie was shyer than he. When he went to buy necessities from her at the store her voice was a whisper and she never looked up. This suited the Sea Gull, who had the natural wild-thing instincts and the same terror of a snare.

A queer, dumb kind of understanding grew up between them. Once he bought her a fairing, and each knew that the matter was an epoch, although it was no more than the pushing back across the counter of the length of ribbon with an awkward "For you," and a rosy blush on her part and a little accepting murmur. But more than once on his flight to Sitka through the next day the Sea Gull laughed boisterously at nothing, and Euphrasie wore the ribbon—blue as his eyes—inside her gown and said her prayers to it.

And then came Angela Fleming and her New York friends into the North to see the Midnight Sun.

The little hotel at The Forks was a popular

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resting-place for tourists on their way to Whitehouse and Dawson. Boatmen could be hired to show city-folk the wonders of this wild Northland, where the Pacific lips its way into bays and backwaters scented and plumed with pines and cottonwood and willow. Fishing was good in the numberless creeks and rivers of the Inside Passage. There was Euphrasie, too, to do washing for the fine ladies with a careful art which no breed nor Indian could compass; and it was over the washing-tub, on the morning which began all things, that the Sea Gull saw her as he came out of the store with a pot of white paint for his motor-boat.

The motor-boat was infinitely dearer to him than Euphrasie. But, because summer was yet young, and the clamour of nesting birds loud in the tall cliffs, and the very wine of life in the air that tasted of sun and salt breezes and burgeoning earth, he halted as he passed, with an unexpected jerk at his heart-strings and a rush of colour which her own pale cheeks reflected as water reflects the sun.

The small change of society was as remote from her as from him. Boy and girl stared at each other, acutely conscious that they liked doing it and nervously unsure of the next step. But Euphrasie, with the steam from the tub about her roughened bronze hair and the small face with the shy hazel eyes, was slowly taking on for the man that mystery which is the forerunner of love. And he, standing against the shining sea, as vital and as marvellous, he had but to put up his finger and she would have followed him into it had he so willed.

And then, indirectly, Miss Fleming interfered, for it was her garments which Euphrasie was washing—delicate, wonderful things of lace and silk and foamy lawn, rippling with opalescent colour where they hung on the line, coquetting into hints of slender shapes and veiled beauty as they sank and swelled. Troubled by some disturbing element the Sea Gull glanced aside as a billow of lace touched his cheek and fell away like the white crest of a wave.

"What are dey—you 'ave caught the clouds, eh?" he asked quickly.

A faint chill touched Euphrasie. This golden moment was hers alone, and the subtle interference of another woman jarred.

"Why, jus' the *lingerie* of Mees Fleming, of New York—she at the hotel."

"*Lingerie!*" The Sea Gull opened his great chest in a roar of laugher. "Mais eet ees a trousseau, dat. A ball-frock, sure."

"What would she do with a ball-frock up here?" Euphrasie shrugged. "She wears linen and tweed outside—all the fine ladies do. But these things they put next the skin. I have washed for many. I know."

"*Parbleu!* Dey mus' 'ave skin of satin, dose fine ladies." The Sea Gull prodded a tentative finger at a ripple of mauve *crêpe-de-Chine*. "Eet ees the ole sack I wear nex' to my skin, wit' a vest of the Hudson Bay blanket sewn wit' twine." He roared again. "*Mon Dieu!* I 'ave t'ink I 'ave the skin an' flesh like oder people. Dat joke is on to me. I 'ave not the skin an' flesh like a fine lady."

"But yours is smooth and white——" Euphrasie broke off, suddenly scarlet, and stooped to her washing again. The Sea Gull watched with new interest her small hands wringing out the silken garments. It seemed as though very contact with them had lifted her to a higher plane, made of her a something which was new and tremulously alluring. How much of the mysterious attraction which was stealing on him was due to Euphrasie and hot young blood and how much was the suggestion of that perfumed and vibrant personality of Angela Fleming the Sea Gull was the last man on earth to know. He came a little nearer, smiling.

"Such leetle hands," he said softly.

Euphrasie's heart stood still with utter bliss. This was La Mouette, the unattainable, speaking as other men spoke—as the tourists spoke who were wont to give kisses with their money to the girls who waited on them. La Mouette never gave kisses. There was no girl along the Coast could have kept that triumph secret if he had. And then, with a sudden, staggering sense of finality, Euphrasie knew that she could do it—would do it if, when——

Hastily she flapped out the wet garments and turned to hang them on the line. And when again she looked round the Sea Gull was gone. Something had startled him; a glance into the complexities of life, which were already assailing his simple outlook, perhaps, or one of those agonies of shyness which sometimes caught him, or, even more, a sense of that fiery awakening which he did not yet know how to accept, how to control.

Euphrasie shut her eyes against a mass of soft silken ruffles. Love had made a woman of her long months ago, and as a woman she spoke now.

"He will come back. His look—it was not the same. Never has he looked at me *so* before. He will come back."

Between the blue crooning water and the dark locked line of the pines the Sea Gull came on a man and woman, and stood aside to let them pass. He knew every type of tourist that came up here, and he loved few of them.

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Wild winds in the pines, white pinnacles tusking the sky, mountainous seas black and solid as onyx—they were his birthright, and it was rarely he helped sell them to the soft-fibred people of the South. But these people did not pass on.

"Hullo!" said the man in lazy, polished tones. You're a boatman, I guess. Got a motor-boat?"

"Aha."

"That's yes, Wally," interpreted the plump little woman with a plump little laugh.

"All right. Well, we want to hire it—and you - to run us around a bit."

"Eet is not for hire—or me, too."

"Oh, darn. Bespoke, eh?"

"*Non*. I do not hire myself. I am La Mouette."

"The devil you are! Well, that doesn't worry me any. Why don't you hire yourself?"

The Sea Gull's chin went up. There was a spark in his blue eyes. Civilly, without a trace of embarrassment or bombast, he answered tone rather than words.

"I am La Mouette. I go when dat I want an' I come when dat I want. I feesh to mak' my monee. I do not obey the oder man—any man."

He turned on his heel and left them staring at each other. Wally rubbed his head forlornly.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he demanded. "The face of these fellows! What can we do, Tony? Every other man's booked up, they say."

"We'll ask at the hotel. And then," Mrs. Wally Soanes laughed suddenly, "then we will set the seductive Angela on him. We simply must have a boat."

"Miss Fleming won't bother about that truck," said her husband moodily.

"Oh, she will if she wants to go around, you'll see."

At the hotel they learnt from the landlord several things anent the Sea Gull. And over the dinner table a native of the coast told them more.

"He is sure enough a gentleman. Never worked for hire except the year he wanted to put up a monument to his aunt. He'd been down to Vancouver and seen some stone monstrosity in a cemetery, and nothing would do him but he'd have one like it over the old lady. She was all he'd ever known in the way of belongings, I reckon. It cost a deuce of a lot, and it near took the bottom out of the boat that brought it. But he got his way all right. He always does."

"I hear that he's had more love offered him than any man on the coast, and given less in exchange," said Mrs. Wally. "I don't wonder. I thought of Balder the Beautiful when I saw him. He's a true Norse God."

"Not he," chuckled Wally. "Perkins swears there's no girl on the Coast can claim she's even been kissed by the Sea Gull. I guess the Norse Gods were not so modest in their affections."

"What do you know about any gods?" said his wife affectionately. "But I'll take that little tale with a grain of salt, I think."

"Oh, I don't know, really. From what I've seen of the girls up here I should say that there wasn't much provocation."

A shout of laughter went up, and the men turned to look at the speaker. She did not look up from the white fingers that were daintily peeling a peach. But the warm, dusky flush on its skin seemed reflected in her dark, beautiful face, and her long, dark eyes held a lazy light.

"They're not beaux," admitted the man next her. "But, then, he hasn't got the chance of comparison, as we have."

"Now's the day for him to learn," said Mrs. Wally meaningly.

"You couldn't teach him." Wally and his wife played up to each other with an art which was almost demoniac sometimes. "Two years ago I decided for a short wife and a merry one, and I got her. But I'm not saying she could make the Sea Gull kiss her, even if I wouldn't have to shoot him with a duck-gun if he tried."

"Then it's left to Angela to prove it. Angela, could you make the Sea Gull kiss you?"

Miss Fleming threw a slow, amused glance round the table. From her little, smooth, dark head to the tips of her slender feet she was what the old darkies of the best Southern families knew as Quality. And Quality every perfect, fastidious line of her remained. Slowly she spoke in the deep, husky Southern voice which is warm and rich as a caress.

"Is it a rite in this part of the world? Why should I want to make him kiss me?"

"Because he won't be hired, but he might be bribed," explained Wally.

"Because you like to impale men and leave them on the spears," said the man beside her.

Angela Fleming let her inscrutable glance rest on him until he winced. Then she joined her slender fingers and inspected them pensively.

"Aren't you rather leaving my feelings out of it? Suppose I lost my susceptible heart to the Norse God?"

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"If you're feeling that way there's someone right here."

Again she glanced aside.

"You really haven't any reticence, Raleigh. If you're going to take to proposing to me in public——"

"You won't listen any more when I get you alone."

Miss Fleming's lovely eyes collected sympathy from the assembled company.

"I come to seek inspiration from the Midnight Sun and the everlasting hills, and I am called on to endure this. He's spoiling my whole trip."

"What about mine?" demanded Raleigh. Miss Fleming lifted her brows.

"Wally, you'll have to bring me the Sea Gull I'd just love to see a natural man for once in a while."

"I'm a natural man," objected Raleigh.

"You!" Miss Fleming rose. "You're a Penny Dreadful—bound in calf and therefore indestructible, to my sorrow. Let's go out on the piazza."

About the little wooden hotel mighty rock bastions and snowy crests rose almost sheerly, painted now with canary and lilac and rose, with indigo and chocolate and deepest rust-red as the sun sank.

A warm glamour held the earth, and the scent from the sun-soaked pines was strong as the tang from the smoky mosquito-smudge burning in its pan on the steps.

The Sea Gull came out of the dark pine-forest suddenly. His moccasined step was noiseless, his muscles flexed perfectly, like those of any wild animal, and the light dazzled on his yellow mass of hair and his fair skin. Miss Fleming, connoisseur of men and of beauty, caught her breath with a little gasp. For the Sea Gull had the charm of his uncouthness, the allure of his simplicity, and the grace and direct power of that type which old Nature turned out before hand and brain grew weary. He halted at foot of the steps, turning scarlet to the round bare column of his throat under the battery of eyes, and Miss Fleming remembered the other woman's word: "Balder the Beautiful."

"Hullo!" cried Wally. "Come to say you've changed your mind, Mouette, eh?"

But the Sea Gull, looking past him to Angela Fleming, gave no heed.

"Maybe he prefers French. Er—esker vous avez changer voter mind, eh?"

"I onderstan' the Englees' more better," said the Sea Gull diplomatically, and Wally's wife laughed.

"My dear man, so does he. But won't you take us? Miss Fleming would be so grateful. She wants to sketch up the creeks and we can't get anyone else."

Miss Fleming turned in the long chair and took the Sea Gull's candid eyes full with her own. She did not speak, but this man whose heart was yet untutored in woman's ways felt the shock of her attack to his soul. Life seemed suddenly filled with sound and colour. Voices of sirens calling across the foam, cadences pitiful-sweet in the light wind among the pines; dazzle and blaze of unheralded glory somewhere, mystery of white rounded arms and throat beneath some fabric filmy and dark. To the Sea Gull it seemed that a spirit leapt up in his heart full-grown, and went springing along his veins with the pounding blood. He made a step, feeling skin and eyes burn. Then a hand shook his arm and he became aware that Wally was offering him money in riotous profusion.

"Aha. Oll ri'. I take heem. I come to-morrow, yes," he stammered, backed away and made off into the shadows like a fleeting coyote. Mrs. Wally laughed oddly.

"It didn't even need the kiss. I pity the man who marries you, Angela."

"Blame Wally's money-bags," said Miss Fleming carelessly. But she sat long over the brushing of her dark, silky hair that night. Used she was to playing with fire, but never such primitive fire as she had seen in those blue eyes. His stare had been neither prayer nor adoration nor even challenge. Amazedly she knew that it was simple annexation. She remembered what was said of this man. Many girls wooed him, but he wooed none. She pushed back the great masses of hair with her slender hands, smiling disdainfully at the red curved mouth and long dark eyes in the mirror.

"King David has honoured you among women, my dear. A fisherman who can't even speak English! He will have to be told, taught. I wonder what he will want to do."

Vaguely stirred by excitement she went to bed, with the sea thundering in her ears and a sense of stupendous, unknown forces abroad on the night. Born to the trivial in life these merely disturbed her. But the Sea Gull, cleaving the waves like a fish, felt their echo in the core of him, and cried out rapturous incoherences, wild desires and determinations to the great flushed face of the waters. This courage sank before sight of her next day, sheathed in white linen and an utter indifference. But gradually it rose again. For, more than twice through that miraculous day, she smiled at him.

And so it began. The following days

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were, by the calendar, just days. But to the Sea Gull each was an epoch. He sold himself gladly to the slavery of chance rewards—a slow smile, a brief word, a stray touch which was uplifted to sacred intimacy by the fact that no one else saw.

Miss Fleming was a genius at building a bundle of commonplaces into a fairy castle of mystery and illusion, and to see the Sea Gull, with his blue hawk-eye and dominant tread and speech, obedient to the least crook of her little finger, amused her and made her forget to be angry with herself for coming to this dull place. She never guessed that she was meddling with cosmic possibilities, poking a slim finger at dormant cataclysms. And not even Raleigh was jealous, for her handling of the matter was art supreme.

Only Euphrasie knew when the casual became the premeditated, when, after a chance encounter on the beach one evening, the Sea Gull haunted those black rocks until his Lady came again, walking through the vagrant glory of refracted light following a storm, to call him with her into Paradise for a brief hour.

After a few days of this Miss Fleming began to understand that she was playing with danger. But she had never been a coward, nor had she yet found a man whom she could not manage. And the Sea Gull was like a sea-breeze blowing through the scented hot-house of her mind. He was tonic balm itself, clean and vigorous and honest, although his simplicity said and did things which would have scandalised the sophisticated Mrs. Wally. But Angela Fleming, wearied of smooth skins and tongues, liked the rough grasp of this man's hands, the rough challenge of his look and words, the better.

And then Euphrasie, wet with steam and white with sorrow, spoke to her over the wash-tub.

"Mees Fleming, you have take my man. What for? He is not'ing to you. In my heart I do know he is not'ing to you. Why have you take him?"

"I?" Miss Fleming's stare was haughty as her words. "What do you mean?"

"He is not for you. I say he is not for you. He was turn to me when you came. Now you take him, an' when you go what is for him—an' for me? Ah! You, you!'

Euphrasie's gentle eyes shot fire. But the other girl's were cold.

"I do not allow insolence from people like you, Euphrasie," she said, "though I confess you are a good laundry-maid."

"You have take him. He does not now see me when he pass. I feel it here—here!" She beat her soapy hands on her young breast. "You play with him. It is that you will kill him, perhap'. I have hear of such things. He does not know. He is but a man." The deep guttural breed-note came into her voice. "How should he know? But I—I am a woman, and I know. I could tear you, tear you! . . ."

"Please do not tear my camisole, anyway. It is real lace."

"*Mon Dieu!* Will I not!"

She wrenched apart the lacy thing she held and flung the handfuls in Miss Fleming's face. For a moment a like flame of fury held the two. Then Miss Fleming stepped back with a faint shrug of her graceful shoulders.

"It will amuse the Sea Gull when I tell him this to-night. Do you think he will tear me in half?"

Euphrasie, trembling, quivering, stared at her mocking face, fascinated. Then, with a bitter cry, she threw her apron over her head and rocked her frail little body. This girl, scarcely older than herself, was too strong for her, cased in her shining beauty and cruelty as in steel.

What chance had a man against her? What chance had La Mouette, with his shyness and his innocence and youth? She moaned as she rocked, and Angela Fleming went away with hasty feet. She was angry with Euphrasie, angry with the Sea Gull, angry—and this was rare in the much-adored Angela Fleming—with herself.

Her face was inscrutable when the Sea Gull found her on the beach that night and took her hand in his with gentle possession and stroked it. But he smiled.

"Eet is so beautiful dat you come 'ere to me," he said. "I 'ave often t'ink how beautiful, an' to-night I will show to you somet'ing. My dear, you are ver' mooch to me."

"My dear" was new, and she shied from it. But the knife at his belt caught the sunlight and unnerved her slightly. Nor could she quite forgive Euphrasie. And so she did not speak, and the Sea Gull drew her to her feet.

"Coom you," he said tenderly, and took her down a track thrust through the forest and bordered by little scattered frame-houses to the square, small wooden church with the graveyard around it. In the graveyard a tall, gaunt obelisk stuck up its ungainly shape at the sky, and the Sea Gull led her to it reverently.

"See you." he said with serene pride. "For *ma tante*—my aunt. I buy eet in Vancouver. Eet cost mooch monee, but I buy

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eet. I 'ave monee. I make mooch. Fine, eh?"

"Splendid!" she said, repressing a shiver. Wind came over the hill and knocked the dead thistle-heads together with a rattling like bones, and the whole place was horrible to her. Never had she so longed for a New York roof-garden after the theatre. The Sea Gull had her slim hand between his, and he did not heed her effort to withdraw it.

"The men of our lifes," he explained, "dey mos'ly die in the sea. Eet ees right w'en dat we makes our living by the sea. But the womans dat we love—dey lie 'ere. Eet ees almos' only womans and leetle children in 'ere. Dere men lie out in the sea. You onderstan'?"

"Yes. Take me away. I hate this place."

"But no," he said, distressed. "I would 'ave you know, eef I can buy dat beeg monument, I can so buy the pretty t'ings for you; I will buy all t'ings for you when dat you marry me, leetle love."

"I marry you?" She was too amazed to be angry yet. "What do you say?"

"I 'ave onderstan'," he said, and now he was struggling to control voice and manner. "You 'ave tell me in your preety way wit'out the words. Dere ees no good womans would coom time and time as you 'ave coom to meet a man eef he was not the man she 'ave chosed. I am not wort' all dat you give, my own. Not yet 'ave I dare beg one leetle kiss. But I t'ank God all days dat you do coom. An' all nights I dream dat you are dere wit' me. I 'ave onderstan', Angela. Dat name ees the name of a angel, for sure."

"Don't be so outrageous." She jerked her hand free. He laughed softly.

"Eet ees den true dat all girls be'ave so an' make coquetry when a man talks of marriage. I 'ad fear to look on you at firs', leetle sweetin'. But w'en you coom to me like the bird dat ees so shy and preety and so kind I onerstan'. To all the oders you ees the great lady, but to me you ees Angela, my leetle own girl. Eet ees ver' beautiful, ver' wonderful. I t'ank God all times."

He looked bigger than she had believed him, here among the crouched gravestones, with the shadows of the pines waving over him in the wind and that nightmare of granite insisting on his determination, his strength, his primitive notions and methods. She leant back with her hands gripping a slanting stone behind her, and stared at him in a sickening, growing fear. Of what were they made, these people who could woo in churchyards, who could talk of death as a natural corollary of life, who could think such unthinkable things as the Sea Gull was thinking now?

"You are quite mistaken." She started at the shake in her voice. Surely she, with a bunch of the best scalps in New York at her belt, was more than a match for this overgrown, primitive boy. "I never thought of such a thing as marrying you."

"Dat ees how I would 'ave it. Oder girls dey make the love to me. Eet ees b-r-r! I do not like eet. But wit' you eet ees not so. Never once 'ave you have said 'La Mouette, I love you.' But you 'ave coom because you are my mate. Jus' as the moose cow cooms t'roogh the forest w'en the spring ees here. She obey the voice of love. You obey eet." He had her hands again. "Angela, dat obelisk I buy for the one womans dat I love. I will buy a more beeg one for you to sleep under w'en that dark day cooms. For me eet mus' be the sea, I t'ink. I could not lie quiet in the 'earth."

"Oh, oh!" She was almost hysterical with that creeping sense of destiny and fear and the crude strangeness of his love-making. "Take me out of here. I hate it. I am not used to—to such things."

"By an' bye you will be use'." He drew her hands up to his lips and kissed them. "The womans under dat stone would welcome you, Angela. Dat ees w'y I bring you 'ere."

The wind stirred his yellow hair into a nimbus, light as feathers, and with his wild blue eyes and jutting hawk-nose he looked more like that barbaric name of his than she had yet seen him. He was not of her world, and for the first time she felt a queer spasm of pride in that she had been able to dominate him, the indomitable relic of an earlier age. He was absurd, of course, and when she went north, a few days hence, he would find it out. But what a story to tell New York, this wooing by a fisherman in a graveyard! And it would lose nothing by the telling, either.

"It was so sweet of you to bring me," she said. "But, please, take me back now."

"I do anyt'ing you say. You know dat, Angela? An' you do onderstan'? Eef one day you sleep 'ere, an' perhap' our children. I will not rest in the sea, I t'ink. Maybe I will turn to a sea-gull an' coom 'ere all day an' call, an' call to my love, my beautiful love."

He had her hand between his great ones, and the strong lines of his face were broken with a quivering intensity. She marvelled that he did not attempt to kiss her. But the Sea Gull was conducting his wooing after

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his own fashion. Each step was a consecration to him, and he dared not take them too fast. Quietly she drew her hand away.

"Now take me back. They will be missing me," she said.

And then he turned and swung beside her with his long, strong tread down the narrow trail. Where it opened to the beach they met Raleigh. How much he knew Miss Fleming had no notion; but how much he guessed was very clear. The veins on his forehead were thickened and darkened by his angry blood, and his voice was a bark.

"You certainly are the limit, Angela, knocking about alone with breeds at this time o'night. Get out of this, Mouette, sharp! An' you come right along back to the hotel, Angela. It's near supper-time."

The sun was low and the whole earth swamped in translucent, rosy light. The Sea Gull, standing very still in the midst of it, looked beautiful and confident as Dawn itself. And to Miss Fleming, Raleigh, effete production of a somewhat vicious circle, was less pleasing than she had ever known before. His money gilded him for her usually, even while she insulted and played with him. But that gold was pinchbeck beside the gold that shone in the Sea Gull's hair and suddenly crowned him in her woman's eyes. Something natural and primitive and strong surged up in her. She turned breathlessly to him.

"There's a canoe on the beach. Will you take me up Shuman Creek now? You said it was too shallow for your motor-boat, and I want to go."

"But for sure you shall go," said the Sea Gull. The hostility faded from his face. He forgot Raleigh. "I will see dat eet ees clean for you."

He ran down over the shining sands with moccasined feet, but Raleigh prevented Miss Fleming when she would have followed.

"Angela! Are you mad? You can't go about alone with that brute. No one ever knows what these breeds will do."

"He's no more a breed than you are, and you know it." She was roused to defiance now. "And I'd sooner go alone with him than with you. I can trust him."

"Trust him? Be darned if you can! You shan't go with him!"

"Do you imagine that you—*you* can dictate to me, Raleigh Hearne?" Her cold fury flung him sharply back on himself. "I'm not your wife yet, please remember."

That fury held up until the shadow of the cliffs closed them in, with tall pines javelin-like above and, on the dark water, the little canoe slipping forward silent as the Sea Gull. He was a bronze god here, touched with a chill greenness from the forest reflection as he knelt at the paddle, and his bared arms and throat showed the muscle-play in carven lines, and the set of his jaw was rigid. She caught his look at last, and his face relaxed slightly.

"You would like dat I hit heem hard an' often—yes?" he asked.

"Very much."

"I will do eet to-morrow. I was not sure—jus' now."

"No, no. You mustn't. Of course you mustn't. I didn't mean it."

"He was not goot to you. I will not 'ave heem spik so to you."

"Never mind. I won't have you touch him, Sea Gull. You don't understand. And please don't talk. It is so glorious—all this."

But it was not of the ragged clefts sinking into night or the headlands flaming with feathery sumach or the amber water that gleamed silver where the paddle dipped that she thought as the Sea Gull took her yet further into the forest heart. She knew now that he attracted her more than any man she had ever met; that beside him Raleigh and his kind seemed mannikins peddling their little tin wares. The broad, direct wind of this man's thought swept away all shams, made Life clear and clean and simple as God meant it to be.

Teased and tossed by the social intricacies of life in a great city her soul had been laved, despite herself, by the winnowing air of these immensities of sea and sky where the Sea Gull's soul lived. It was all beautiful, impossible, of course, fantastic, something that could never be. And yet, if it could be? If she, asking no more of life than Euphrasie asked, could face it with the Sea Gull's arm around her, his broad breast to shield her from storms? She coquetted with the notion while the Sea Gull crooned an old *voyageur*-song of the North, and the echo came back musically from the grim ranked pines above.

> *"Toi qu'arrive de Mostigamen,*
> *Prêt moi ta pip qui je fume.*
> *Houi-la, houi-la, houi la-a-a,*
> *J'ai pas de tabac"*

The song and the liquid dip of the paddle ceased. The Sea Gull had run the canoe into a little backwater where red-top grass, splashed with the king's purple of fireweed, stood thick in a clearing. A few tepee-poles and a shack, golden-browned by weather, were drenched by the light that filled the place with an intensity of burning colour which brought the artist soul of Miss Fleming

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gasping to her lips. The Sea Gull laughed in his delight.

"You like heem? I t'ink you would. We will 'ave a leetle shack like dis, all in the fores', Angela—yes?"

She looked at him where he squatted on the bank, holding the nose of the canoe. Frank and kindly although his face showed it had a force which quite suddenly disquieted her. These people—their notions were so outrageously different, so primitive. Supposing Raleigh were right? Supposing the Sea Gull considered that grotesque incident in the graveyard when he introduced her to his dead aunt as some binding ceremony? After all, she knew nothing of him really. She flung the thought off impatiently and stepped out, ignoring his hand.

"I'll just pick some flowers and then we'll go back," she said. "We must have come quite a long way."

"Eet will not be more than one hour to go back. But eet will soon be dark. You do not mind w'en eet ees razzer dark, Angela?"

His persistent use of her name irritated her, and she turned to tell him so. And then she realised that she really was rather afraid. The intense hush of this place where every twig, every flower stood as though carved in bronze; the mysterious murmur of the water, the serene, contented certainty of this man's look were all definite factors ranged against her. She dragged up a double armful of the glowing fireweed and turned back to the canoe.

"Come," she said. "I want to go back."

"Jus' like dat," said the Sea Gull reverently. "Wit' you hands full of flame an' you w'ite dress an' dat leetle dark curl against you ear w'ere the jewel ees. Eet ees like dat I will remember you for ever, my own beautiful. Like dat!"

"You can remember while you're paddling, can't you? Be quick. We must get home."

The Sea Gull came nearer. In the strong light his big body showed tense and his voice was vibrant.

"Dere ees one day 'home' will not be away from me. I t'ink dat all times, now Angela; I will go no more on the long trip. I will stay home and work so dat you will coom. Angela, you will coom soon? The life ees not so ver' long—not so long as my want of you?"

Something in the simple, tender trustfulness of him touched long-hid springs in her. Swift tears burnt her eyes.

"Oh, don't. I'm so sorry. You don't understand. You'll never understand."

"'Ow would eet be gif' a man like me to onderstan' a woman like you? The sky onderstan', perhap'. An' the wind an' the sea an' the Northern Lights. All the beautiful t'ings. But not a man like me, no. An' yet you love me. Eet ees so strange. Sometime I hit myself. I knock my han' on the tree. I say 'Wake up, wake up. She love you. Ride the wind an' make you motor-boat run to the sun. She love you. You can do all t'ings.' Ah! Eet ees like a god I am den!"

He flung his head back with a big chest-laugh. The whole virile personality of him seemed aglow, intensified. The girl felt a definite shame and regret.

"You are like a god always, Sea Gull. If you care like this, why have you never asked me for a kiss, or tried to take one?"

The scarlet ran up his face. He half-turned from her; then turned back with his big hands clenched up.

"W'en dat you choose to gif' me heaven," he said, very low. "W'en dat you choose, Angela."

The bare mention of it had shaken him more than she could have believed possible. Selfish, thoughtless although she was, a genuine remorse smote her. She must put an end to this to-night. She would go out of the Sea Gull's life with a quick and entire certainty. But, innate flirt to the core, she could not forbear leaving him a sweet memory, although well she knew that there would be poison in it.

"Take me back now, and then I will kiss you," she said.

A moment he stared at her, bewildered, with his keen blue eyes wide. Then a glow came over his face, blazed in his eyes. He laughed, waving his hands, and ran prancing down to the canoe. He was like a great boy, unashamed in his delight.

"Coom on," he cried. "Coom, Angela. We cannot wait. Eet ees not one minute we can wait. Coom, little angel. Oh, be quick."

Half reluctantly Miss Fleming followed. And then, piercing the dusky silence like a spear, came a long, thin, wailing cry. The girl started, with her nerves quivering.

"Oh, a wolf," she gasped. But the Sea Gull had flung himself out of the canoe and was standing with head up, like a listening wild animal. Thinly the cry came again. His face relaxed, and he walked over to the shack.

"Eet ees the cry of a chil', dat," he said. "In the shack. You a womans an' not know dat, Angela? Aha! I know."

He flung the low door open, and a

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Miss Fleming sprang up with a gasping cry . . . her whole white, slender figure was supplication itself. The Sea Gull looked at her as one might look on his dead.

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moment she saw him black against the red light that poured through the western window. Then he entered, as though into a furnace. Later on she thought how true that fancy of hers had been. It was a few seconds only before he came out, troubled and eager.

"Dere is a chil'. A leetle babby. Ver' sheck, I t'ink eet. Coom see, Angela."

"Oh, why?" She shrank back. "Surely there is someone with it? I couldn't do anything. I know nothing of sickness."

"Eet ees by heemself lonely. I do not know w'at ail heem. The face eet ees all sore, an' the poor leetle 'ands. An' the eyes ees close' wit' the swelling. Coom see w'at we shall do, my own. Coom."

"No, no." She was revolted, alarmed, now. "How can you suggest such a thing? Why, it might be smallpox—anything. I hope you didn't touch it."

He stood looking down at her, with the light on his bare throat and arms and chest. She noticed again the faint golden fluff on the skin, like the hair of an infant.

"Don' you 'ear?" he said, puzzled. "Eet ees a leetle seeck babby all alone. You will coom see w'at we will do for eet? Listen! Him cry! Again!"

She shut her ears against the piping, wavering sound.

"I wouldn't go near it for a pension. How can you want me to! And it's only an Indian baby, anyway. Take me home, quick, and send a doctor. He's the proper person to look after it."

"A woman ees proper person to look after a babby—always."

"Not this woman. I don't know anything about babies or sickness. And I don't want to." She stamped petulantly. "We'd have no right to carry an infectious disease down to the village either. Do leave it alone till the doctor comes."

"I do not onderstan'." He scraped the ground with a moccasined foot, speaking slowly. "Eet ees a leetle seeck babby alone. You ees a womans and I a man. An' you say do not'ing, no?"

"Of course I say 'do nothing.' What could we do—except catch the horrible thing ourselves? Come at once!"

His very bright and keen eyes were fastened on her now. He spoke slowly.

"You ees feared. Feared for dat beautiful w'ite skin an' preety face. You 'old the silk an' the sof' lace nex' you. I 'ave seen. But not the seeck babby, no! I do not t'ink you onderstan', Angela."

"I don't care what you think. And I won't be looked at like that. I will not. How dare you presume to—to judge me! Can't you see what an outrageous thing you're suggesting? Take me back, quick, and send Dr. Shale."

"An' den perhap' dat babby will be died. He cannot coom in t'ree hour an' more. You onderstan'? No, no, you did not mean dat, my beautiful one. Eet moan an' moan. Eet cry an' cry an' cannot see—dere!"

Again the cry, weaker than before, cut between them like a knife. Through the thickening blue dusk Miss Fleming went hastily over to the canoe. Her face was set and her eyes hard.

"Of course, I'm sorry, frightfully sorry. But if the poor little wretch is as sick as you say it's better dead, I imagine. Anyway, I can't do anything. I never could bear seeing horrible things. Don't stand staring like that. If you're as troubled about it as you say you'll hurry and get the doctor."

The Sea Gull twisted his big hands together. In his simple, primitive belief life was a sacred thing, especially all young and helpless life. His creed was very much the direct and naked one of the animals. The male provided food and protection, the female tended the infant life, for which both slaved. Making all allowances, he could not see that the basic law of Nature was very different here. But not yet could he judge his Beautiful One.

"I do not onderstan'," he muttered, and turned to the shack. And then Miss Fleming was at his side, gripping his arm.

"What are you doing? Don't go in there again; you mustn't go in there. You might catch the infection. You must take me home first."

"But we mus' take the babby, too. I will wrap heem in my coat. You shall not see."

His distressed, grieved face would have pierced her egoism if she had been less thoroughly alarmed.

"See? How ridiculous you are! It would be there just the same, wouldn't it? I will not have it in the canoe with me. I will not! Do you hear? Take me back at once, when I tell you to. Why, the child might have leprosy, and then the very air would be tainted. I will not stay near it another moment, and if you were not so ignorant you'd realise why I shouldn't be expected to."

The Sea Gull caught her fluttering hands in a crushing grip. His brows were drawn together until his eyes looked bird-fierce either side the strong nose. His voice was thick, jerky.

"You wan' not go wit' dat babby?"

"No. Haven't I said so a hundred times?"

["THE SEA GULL" continued overleaf.]

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"You wan' I take you first an' leave dat babby?"

"*Yes.*"

"An' eef eet be die w'en we coom again—yes?"

"We can't help that. It's probably dying now"

The Sea Gull closed her hands slowly. But she felt them numbed yet.

"I take dat babby firs' an' coom back for you," he said.

"No, no, no! I won't be left alone in this desolate place. Why, there might be wolves or bears or—or—oh, how can you be such a brute as to think of such a thing? Do you hear? I won't be left alone. I couldn't stand it."

She caught the sides of his shirt with shaking hands, and her lovely face lifted, drawn with terror, to his. "Don't leave me! I'd die, I'd die!"

A more sophisticated man or one of quicker wits would probably have given way on the instant. But the Sea Gull's primitive intelligence received one fact at a time, and that slowly.

"You 'ave fear for you preety face an' not fear for the seeck babby," he said. "I do not onderstan'. I t'ought womans were not made dat way."

"Oh, we are. We are. Lots of us are. Just take me back and I'll give you all the money you——" Something in his face changed the word on her mouth. "I'll give you that kiss I promised you. I'll give it to you now if you'll take me home at once."

She reached her face up, fine and delicate and softly coloured as some rare flower. Her eyes were dark wells of light. She was asking the Sea Gull to come into his heaven. But he looked down on her with sweat on his face, and in his temples the veins stood out. That tremendous force of Nature which in the animals is called instinct was compelling him, insisting on his obedience to its prompting.

This beautiful thing was a false thing, poison, a husk only. That scrap of crying life in the shack was the real, the immortal claimant, claiming the immortal in himself. He could no more reason this out than the baby could. But he felt it to the core of him with a force that turned him cold.

Suddenly, with a great cry like that of some hurt wild beast, he flung her off and dashed into the hut with his arm over his face as though to shut out that which he left behind him.

Miss Fleming ran down to the canoe and began unfastening it with trembling hands. Then she paused. It would be madness for her inexperience to attempt to paddle this frail thing down those rapids and that network of creeks and inlets. She sank down among the firewood with hands shut over her breast and a veritable anguish of terror in her heart.

To the Sea Gull, used to loneliness, a few hours' wait in the forest was as nothing. He could no more comprehend her dread of that than her dread of the sick child. Presently he came out, carrying the moaning bundle. But he staggered and his head drooped, like a man who has been partly stunned. He slunk past the woman and laid the baby in the canoe-bottom. Then he stepped heavily in and took the paddle.

Miss Fleming sprang up with a gasping cry. Her hands were flung out and her head back, and her whole white, slender figure was supplication itself. The Sea Gull looked at her as one might look on his dead. Then he thrust the paddle deep and shot away down stream.

In the mists rising among the creeks and drifting through the forest that poignant memory of her seemed dissolving into those vagaries of silk and filmy lace, alluring, eluding, which had been his first knowledge of her. She felt to him unreal, unsubstantial as they. Life felt unreal. He himself, with his great thews tightened and his strong teeth set, seemed no more than a shadow of a dream. The one vital and hideous certainty left him was that, in some way, his Angela, his Beautiful One, had awakened devils, ghouls who were more loathly to him than the loathly thing in the canoe-bottom.

In the pale light which never grew to dark at this time of year he came ashore, and walked up the trail to the village with the child. And here, as it chanced, Euphrasie was the first to meet him. The Sea Gull swerved from her. Any and every woman was evil to him at this present. But Euphrasie heard the low moaning and she ran after him.

"What is it? Oh, La Mouette, is it a little child?"

The Sea Gull halted. His face was old and strange and his eyes were wild.

"Eet ees a seeck babby. Perhap' eet 'as the small-pox. I do not know. I take him to the doctor."

"The doctor has gone down to Daplin. Give him to me. Oh, the poor darling! Give him to me—quick!"

The Sea Gull looked down sternly at her reaching arms.

"Perhap' eet ees the small-pox. Perhap' you 'ave it, too, byme-bye."

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A moment Euphrasie recoiled. Then her hands came over the bundle.

"If you're not afraid, I'm not. Give him to me. I know all about babies."

The Sea Gull surrendered his burden without a word. He seemed beyond interest, and that phase held, even when he stood later in the door of the dining-room at the hotel and delivered his message.

"I 'ave 'ere Michael who will go in a canoe up Shuman Creek to bring back Mees Fleming. She would not coom wit' me because I 'ave a seeck babby."

Then he vanished, and for years that part of the coast heard of him no more. Word came to Euphrasie that he was dead; that he was whaling in the Arctic; that he had gone over to Kamchatka to seal with the Russians; that he was down in San Francisco running a saloon. But there was never a word direct from the Sea Gull until the evening she came home and found him in the piazza. He rose up, big and silent. His face had the immobility of one long battered by the elements, and his voice was deeper and dulled.

"I 'ave coom back to the Coast, Euphrasie. You remember me, no?"

"Of course I remember you." She steadied her voice with an effort. "Oh, I am so glad to see you again, La Mouette."

"Dey don' call me dat now—no," he said. He looked at her helplessly; sat down and took his head in his hands. "I don' know why I coom back at all. I 'ave go up to the graveyard, but eet ees lonelee. I 'ave no 'ome anyw'ere now, Euphrasie."

"I never knew you wanted one," she said, very low.

"All men want a 'ome sometime. I weesh my aunt live now. She a beeg womans. Plenty to love, my aunt. I am not lonelee den."

"You—you haven't married?"

"Dere ees not any womans I ever want to marry, no," he said.

Euphrasie stepped to the inner door and opened it. There was a low murmur of voices, and then small feet scudded across the floor and small arms clasped the Sea Gull about the knees and a gurgling, childish voice laughed at him.

"Den you 'ave marry, Euphrasie?" The Sea Gull raised his head and took the brown round face between his hands. "Your leetle girl, yes?"

"No." Euphrasie's voice shook a little. She came near, with her soft hazel eyes shining. "No. She's yours, La Mouette."

"Mine?" He looked up with darkened face. His gentling hands fell away. "Dat ees a damn' lie, Euphrasie. I never 'ave no child nor no womans dat I love."

"Oh, don't you remember? That's the baby you brought out of the shack up Shuman Creek five years ago. She didn't have smallpox or anything but what the doctor cured easily. I've kept her. I've looked after her till you came home."

She put her arms about the child's shou'ders, smoothing back the soft dark hair. Her lips smiled, but her eyes were wet. The whole gentle soul of her had prayed for this day, but just what was to come of it she dared not think. The Sea Gull looked on the two. Then he stretched his great hands out.

"Coom 'ere, my leetle one," he said softly, and took her close against him. Over her head his tired blue eyes met Euphrasie's.

"Perhap' eet ees dat I 'ave coom 'ome, yes?" he said, and smiled.

ABSENCE.

If I had eyes to see
And saw not thine,
The noonday sun for me
Would cease to shine.

If I had ears to hear,
And thou wert still,
Not angel music, dear,
My soul could thrill.

M. S.

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The Dancer at the Folies Caprice.

By William Le Queux.

Illustrated by A. Gilbert.

This is a further complete story in Mr. Le Queux's dramatic series, relating the adventures of Claud Heathwaite, C.B., chief travelling agent of the Foreign Office, London. These stories are the very breath of intrigue and romance, and reveal Mr. Le Queux's intimate knowledge of the plots and counter-plots of European secret diplomacy.

At seven o'clock one summer's evening last year I was eating my dinner in Szikszay's, the famous restaurant in Budapest. The luxurious room was crowded with well-dressed folk, and above the chatter and laughter sounded the low, plaintive music of the swarthy-faced gipsy orchestra, the famous Banda Marczé.

When in Budapest I always prefer my food at Szikszay's to dining at the colossal Hungaria, where I usually stay. There is always light and life there, for it is one of the gayest restaurants in Europe, while the "lamb paprika" and chicken stew with cream are delicious.

Now my companion happened to be a pretty, dark-haired and well-dressed girl named Gisèle Gruscha, to whom a few days before I had been introduced at the Otthon Club, that meeting place of Hungarian authors and journalists in the Elisabethring. David Bauer, the well-known Hungarian writer, had introduced us, for as a matter of fact I had travelled from London especially to make the acquaintance of the charming little dancer who nightly delighted the patrons of the world-famous establishment, the Folies Caprice.

On arrival at Budapest I had no idea where I should find the young lady who was now eating her dinner opposite me. But the Hungarian capital is unique in one respect. You can obtain the address of anyone in the city, whether resident or visitor, by paying a small fee at an office in the Zrinyi-utcza. So I paid my fee and I was handed a slip with Mademoiselle's address upon it. Then I sought the aid of a man named Karl Böckh, who was in secret an agent of the British Government during the War, and within a very short time my introduction to Mademoiselle was effected by his friend, David Bauer.

Gisèle was, I found, quite an entertaining companion. About twenty-four, she had, she told me, been on the stage since she was ten, and she had danced in nearly every capital in Europe—except London. Her parents were gipsies, her father being the "prima" of a café orchestra in Graz. She spoke French fairly well, besides German, and of course her native Hungarian.

After we had been introduced three days before I had gone to the Folies Caprice and watched her wild dancing, so loudly applauded for its graceful abandon. Next day we lunched together at the National Casino, and in the afternoon had taken a car and driven around the environs of the city, afterwards returning to the Hungaria, where I gave her a *mélange* in the great palm lounge which overlooked the Danube.

"I am tired—very tired of Budapest," she declared, as she looked across the restaurant with a pair of splendid, velvety eyes. Her features were well-cut, her complexion clear, and her mouth was most charming. "I prefer Paris," she added.

"You lived in Paris quite a long time, did you not?"

"About a year and a half. I was at Olympia and afterwards at the Marigny," she replied, glancing up at the clock and noticing that it would soon be time for her to be off to dress for the stage. "I love Paris," she added, "next to our country here. To my mind no country in all the world is so beautiful as that about the Plattensee."

"Oh, you mean Lake Balaton!" I said. "Yes. I've heard how lovely it is there. It's within a motor run, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Mademoiselle. "I'd so like to go to Lepsény to-morrow."

"Very well," I replied. "Let's go. I'll call for you at ten o'clock in the morning—

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eh? I've heard so much about the Lake—that blue water, and the view."

"The legends about it are most interesting," she said.

"I've never heard them," I replied. "Tell me."

"Oh, la! la! It is too late. Let us have our coffee, for I have to get to the theatre. Kalocsa is most furious if I am five minutes late."

So the dainty little dancer swallowed the coffee which the waiter brought to her, and ten minutes later we were in a taxi going swiftly towards the Folies Caprice.

I left her at the stage-door and crossed to a neighbouring café, where I smoked cigarettes and idled over the *Hirlap*.

The mission upon which I had been sent was a very puzzling one. The instructions given me by the Chief in Downing Street were mysterious, and at the same time decisive. My orders were to meet a certain person and to endeavour to discover certain facts which were most cleverly hidden. The four weeks following I had spent in constant travel and inquiry. In those four weeks I had been in Cairo, Marseilles, Madrid, Paris and Brussels. Indeed, I had moved very quickly and had spent many sleepless nights in *wagons-lits*.

Yet here I was at last, making myself agreeable to Gisèle Gruscha, the famous dancer, known to the patrons of the variety theatre all over Europe. I posed as a man of unlimited means, and this apparently appealed to her. She was, of course, all unconscious of my knowledge concerning her and her associates.

As far as I had been permitted to ascertain she lived in a very comfortable flat in the Vacz—a highly respectable thoroughfare—where she had, as maid, a stout old Hungarian woman who wore most wonderful earrings of gold filigree work. She was of gipsy strain, like her mistress.

I sat smoking and still reflecting. I knew that the inquiry upon which I had been sent must be of high importance, because Böckh had been warned of my coming, and had been instructed to give me assistance and then to efface himself. During the war he had had, I knew, a very narrow escape of betrayal as an agent of Great Britain, owing to the jealousy of a woman.

He had, however, been able to prove himself innocent before a court-martial, even though he had, in secret, a powerful wireless station installed in a country house near Fiume by which he gave lots of valuable information to our Army co-operating with the Italians around Venice.

That night I sat in a *fauteuil* at the Folies Caprice watching Mademoiselle perform her famous dance in a daring costume which consisted mostly of feathers. Afterwards she rejoined me. We had supper at the Hungaria, and then we parted, arranging to meet early next morning.

The instant she had driven off home in a taxi-cab I got into another, and ordered the man to take me to a certain point in the Vacz. As we followed her taxi I saw it drive up to her door, and she entered with a latch key.

Then, when she had disappeared, I alighted, paid the driver, and shrank into a dark doorway to wait.

I suppose I had stood there for twenty minutes or so when on almost the same spot where I had alighted a fine private car with glaring headlights pulled up, and from it an elegantly dressed woman descended.

"Put out the lights," she said in French to her driver, and he switched them off instantly.

She walked towards the door through which the pretty dancer had entered, and on her way passed close by me.

By the light of the electric street lamp I saw her face quite plainly—and I recognised it. The woman was Portuguese, and her name was da Silva. She was a well-known figure in the best restaurants in London, yet something of a mystery. She lived in an expensive flat in Mount Street, and as a war widow had many male friends who took her about and gave her a good time.

I had had my suspicions that she was in Budapest, but the fact that she should visit Mademoiselle Gruscha at that hour puzzled me greatly. As a matter of fact I was there to watch for an entirely different person.

Was Gisèle playing me a double game? She was quite capable of it, I knew.

That Madame da Silva was expected was proved by the fact that scarcely had she pressed the electric bell when the door was opened by an unseen hand, and she slipped within. Meanwhile the car stood in darkness at the kerb not far from where I was standing, and the driver, having lit a cigarette, curled himself up on his seat patiently. Apparently he was fully aware of the whims of his smart, go-a-head mistress.

Ten minutes later an elderly, poorly-dressed man hobbled along the street, and as he passed I saw that his face was thin and emaciated. His clothes spoke mutely of genteel poverty, his steps being nearly noiseless on account of the thin worn soles of his shoes. He was about to pass the house when suddenly he halted and examined the door. The latter appeared to interest him. For a few seconds he paused in reflection. Then he

["*THE DANCER AT THE FOLIES CAPRICE*" *continued overleaf.*]

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seemed to scrawl something upon the lintel. Afterwards he passed on, and I did not see him again.

When twenty minutes later I succeeded in reaching the door unseen by the dozing chauffeur, I saw that a sign had been chalked upon the door, two circles—a double zero. Of its meaning I was at present in entire ignorance.

It puzzled me. But I was in Budapest on a mysterious mission, therefore I went back to my hiding place and remained watchful. Fortunately the night was very dark, though the electric street lamps threw a fairly good light along the pavement. All was now quiet, save for a woman's voice in a neighbouring house singing one of the old Tsigane love-songs.

Why had that double zero been placed upon the door? Was it as a warning, I wondered?

I suppose it was nearly two o'clock in the morning when I saw the figures of two men approaching. They were burly Hungarian peasants. They passed me, and suddenly halted at the door of Mademoiselle's house. One was about to ring the bell, but the other recognised the chalk-mark and stayed his companion's hand. Instantly they whispered in alarm, and then, after a brief consultation, they both passed on out of sight.

As I stood there still keeping that night vigil I fell to wondering what my adored Myrtle, safe in her beautiful home in Cheshire, would think if she knew that I was playing the admirer of the *chic* little dancer, Gisèle Gruscha. But it is part of the daily life of the diplomat to dangle at a petticoat and make himself as agreeable to the old hag of seventy as to the pretty, bobbed-haired flapper.

I was in Budapest with the express purpose of making myself as pleasant as possible to Mademoiselle. She believed me to be a wealthy man, no doubt. Little did the young lady dream that the cost of our motor-drives, dinners, and lunches was being defrayed by the Secret Service Fund.

Just before half-past three another curious incident occurred. The curtain of a window on the first floor of the house in which Mademoiselle lived—a window of her *salon*, I knew it to be—was drawn, and an unseen hand placed upon a table a lamp with a large silk shade of bright orange.

That it was meant as a signal was apparent, just as the chalk-marks upon the door, therefore I still watched with redoubled interest.

Presently on the opposite side of the road there came along the same poverty-stricken man who had placed the sign upon the door. For a few moments he stood looking up at the window. Then, as though satisfied, he moved along.

Evidently Mademoiselle was watching for him, for as soon as he had gone the curtain was drawn and the lamp removed.

Ten minutes later my little friend, accompanied by Madame da Silva, emerged, and, waking up the chauffeur, they entered the car and drove away, after which, wearied but by standing so long in my place of concealment, I made my way back to the Ferencz-Jozsef-Rakpart and into the Hotel Hungaria.

At ten o'clock next morning I called for Mademoiselle in a big limousine I had hired. The elderly maid ushered me into a pretty *salon* where, upon a side-table, I saw the lamp with the great shade of orange silk which had been used as a signal in the night.

A moment later Mademoiselle, ready dressed and looking very charming, came in and greeted me enthusiastically. Somehow I felt myself in a curious and even mysterious atmosphere in that place. All the incidents of the night rose before me, and I wondered where she had been with the woman da Silva.

The morning was bright and beautiful as we sped out of the handsome city on the long, straight road to Kelenföld, celebrated for its red wine, where beyond rose the range of the Vértes mountains in the blue distance. Mademoiselle Gisèle was bright and vivacious, chattering merrily as we went along and pointing out the places of interest to me.

Over an interminable marsh we went for several kilometres, scattering flocks of wild birds, and then into a long, shady road which wound upward towards the mountains—the high road to Zagrab, or Agram, as we call it.

After a delightful run of a couple of hours we came to a picturesque little town called Lepsény, and into sight of the blue waters of Lake Balaton, which is not only the largest in Hungary, but in the whole of Central Europe.

First sight of the "Plattensee" will long live in my memory.

"Delightful—most charming!" I declared involuntarily.

"I said that you would agree this is one of the finest views in Europe," laughed Mademoiselle. "I love this place!"

She ordered the car to pull up at the lake-side, and I gazed around. The scenery was most picturesque. The sky was quite serene,

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yet the great expanse of water displayed numerous lovely shades of colour.

"See the changing lines!" my pretty companion exclaimed. "We call it the 'vesz.' But they have terrible storms here. The steamers toss about and the waves break over them. Every year there are numbers of wrecks. And look yonder!" With her white-gloved hand she pointed to a series of pinnacles on the opposite shore, each of which was crowned by the ruins of an ancient castle, like a picture from some fairy book.

As we went along the edge of the lake for a run before luncheon she expressed an opinion that the Balaton had a great future before it.

"You see it in its primitive state to-day," she said. "But as a watering-place it must soon become popular. The bathing is equal to sea bathing on account of the surf, and the water contains a good deal of salt, while the mud possesses great healing qualities."

"I suppose you have been here often—eh?" I remarked.

"I used to come here with Henri," she replied.

"Henri? Who is he?"

Instantly I noticed a change in her manner. She was annoyed with herself for mentioning that name.

"Oh! Only a friend of mine," she laughed.

Henri! Then the suspicion was well-based! It was concerning a man whose Christian name was Henri that I was in Hungary—Henri Beaujon.

"An admirer, I suppose?" I ventured to remark.

"No, only a friend," she answered, and then in the next breath suggested that we should return to Lepsény for lunch.

On our way back along the lakeside she told me one of the legends regarding its origin.

"The peasants about here believe to this day that giants inhabited the neighbourhood," she said. "And they think that those mountains in the distance, which really look like coffins, are their graves!"

At Mademoiselle's orders we pulled up at a small but most picturesquely situated hotel called the Korona, at the head of the lake, and, descending, strolled upon the terrace, which was built out to the blue water. Upon it a number of tables were set, at which a dozen or so motorists from Budapest were seated at their *al fresco* meal.

More than one of them recognised Mademoiselle as the famous dancer of the Folies, and whispered as we passed. She selected a table at the end beside a glass screen, which kept off the wind from up the lake. It was evident she knew that table. And next moment I had a great surprise.

A burly man, whose fat face was wreathed in smiles, came along the terrace and bowed to us. He was evidently the proprietor. But instantly I recognised him as one of the two Hungarian peasants who had passed Mademoiselle's house in the night hours—the one who had discovered the chalk-mark of the double zero!

Why had he done so? He was no longer dressed as a peasant, but as the hard-working and prosperous hotel proprietor. He beckoned a beetle-browed, sallow-faced waiter, and the latter at once became obsequious.

I am quick to notice the expressions upon people's countenances. I can usually read them. But I looked from Mademoiselle to the mysterious proprietor of the Korona and discerned no glance of affinity.

The man moved away to another table, where he chatted with the elderly man and a woman seated there.

"I don't like that fellow," I said purposely. "He has a sinister face."

"Has he?" laughed the girl. "Lots of people say so. But he's quite a good fellow All the motorists from Budapest know Charles Baross, of the Korona. He always gives them an excellent luncheon."

He certainly did. The dishes were equal to any I had ever eaten at the Hermitage at Moscow, or the Boulevard in Bucharest. At the much-advertised restaurants one gets the worst food. There are little places I know in Soho, in the Montmartre, in the back streets in Leghorn, and in the by-ways of Brussels and Rome, where one can get far better food than in any of the great hotels *de luxe*.

So it was at the Korona. We ate most perfect dishes, and the grilled *fogas* and the *pilaf* which followed were among the best I have ever tasted.

But I had made one discovery on the journey out, namely, that Mademoiselle had been down to the lake before—with "Henri." Was it Henri Beaujon? That was the problem.

The day was perfect, and I admit that I was thoroughly enjoying myself. Yet I had a motive in it all—I was carrying out a secret mission with which the Chief had entrusted me. He had explained it briefly in his big, gloomy room in Downing Street, and had left it to me to carry it out and to discover what I could.

The man Baross, proprietor of the Korona, was constantly hovering in our vicinity while we ate. Because I had recognised him as

["THE DANCER AT THE FOLIES CAPRICE" continued overleaf.]

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the man who had been warned by those chalked circles, I suspected him, and hence I watched him very carefully.

Presently, in an urbane and obsequious manner, he advanced to our table, and addressing me in French, he said:

"I trust, M'sieur, everything has been satisfactory?"

"Certainly it has," I replied. "I must congratulate you upon your chef."

"Ah! M'sieur!" he exclaimed, holding up his hands. "Now, after the war, a good chef is very hard to find. I am not yet satisfied. I hope to do better next season."

"Why, you always give us excellent dishes, M'sieur Charles," laughed my companion.

"You have been here before, Mademoiselle! I recognise you now," said the stout proprietor suddenly. "I thought I recollected your face. I saw you dancing a month ago at the Folies Caprice—marvellous! I have not been in Budapest since."

He lied! And for what reason, when only sixteen hours ago I had seen him in that city?

After we had eaten our dessert while gazing out upon the blue waters of the lake, I rose and left my sprightly little companion in order to go to a small shop down the road on pretence of buying some picture postcards. I passed along the terrace into the *salle-à-manger* of the restaurant, but a few seconds later I turned and peered back along the terrace.

Gisèle Gruscha was engaged in a hurried conversation with the stout, overfed Baross. He had bent down, and after listening to what she said, he put his forefinger upon the tablecloth, and was apparently placing before her some alternative.

I saw that the girl's face had gone pale. She evidently held him in fear. Yet if so, why had she deliberately brought me to that most delightful spot in all Hungary?

As every moment passed the mystery of it all increased. The Chief had expressed himself nonplussed, and had left it to me to elucidate what was a very ingenious and deep-laid tangle. But when I had arrived in Budapest I had never contemplated such a maze of mystery.

Henri! Mademoiselle had inadvertently referred to him as her "friend." It set me thinking. Was the man she had mentioned really Henri Beaujon? If so, then much was plain. Half my inquiry had been completed.

After lunch we strolled in the hotel garden along a shady path where the waves of the blue Lake lapped at our feet, and sat down in an arbour to smoke. She took one of my cigarettes and, lighting it, drew a long breath.

"Ah!" she said. "How I love the beautiful open country, the lake, the mountains! How stifled and confined I feel each night when I dance in that hot, fœtid atmosphere of tobacco and perfume. It nauseates me."

For a few seconds I did not reply. I knew that Mademoiselle was doing her best to mislead me into believing in her longing for a country life, while really her whole soul was centred in her profession as a dancer, and she hated being beyond the confines of any of the capitals.

"Yes," I said, humouring her. "I, too, hate cities—I love the country! I suppose you have explored all these delightful byways long ago with your friend, Henri?"

She frowned. It was evident the remark caused her annoyance.

"There are some people I wish to forget. He is one of them!" and she sighed.

I drew a long breath and apologised, yet I well knew that she did not wish to forget him. That was if the Henri in question was the Henri I suspected.

My earnest desire was to learn more of him. During the past forty-eight hours I had been confident that Gisèle was not what she represented herself to be. The incidents of the previous night I could not put out of my thoughts. That thin-faced, poverty-stricken man who had chalked the double zero upon the door, the clandestine visit of Madame da Silva, and the fear of the burly proprietor of the Korona when he saw the chalk-mark—all were mysterious. What did the mark denote? Was it a sign of warning—or of immunity? It was one or the other.

Again, what meaning had the sign of that orange lamp-shade? On the night previous when I had watched I had noticed that the shade was of pale blue, though it did not attract me. Yet that morning as I had stood in the *salon* waiting for Mademoiselle I recognised the lamp as the same that had on the previous day borne a pale blue silk shade with a border of black velvet and a fringe of silvery glass beads.

All the appointments in Mademoiselle's flat were artistic as became a young person of artistic temperament.

We spent a most delightful day along the lake. We hired a motor-boat and went across to the opposite shore.

On going back to the Korona, the proprietor, Baross, advanced towards us. Instinctively I disliked him. He seemed to be

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very anxious to say something further to my companion. Why indeed had he been in Budapest on the previous night?

The thin-faced passer-by had placed that mark upon the door with some explicit motive. But the man who had worn the dress of a Hungarian of the vineyards had been terrified by it. Why? Was the motive a sinister one?

I glanced into the face of the man who held no suspicion that he had passed quite close to me in the night. His eyes were beady and shifty, and his mouth hard and cruel. That he ran the Korona at considerable profit was quite apparent. Indeed, there were at that moment nearly a hundred people at the little tables on the terrace, sipping their coffee or *sirops*, and smoking while they enjoyed one of the most delightful views in Europe.

In order to give the man further opportunity of speaking with my companion, I left my coffee and rising, made the excuse that I must write a letter. And I went along to the hotel writing-room.

To do so I had to turn a corner of the terrace. But half-a-minute later I peered round again unseen, and as I did so I realised that the burly proprietor had his hand over my coffee cup. Why? Was he putting something into it?

In that moment another truth flashed before me. My surmise as to the man Henri was, I felt confident, quite correct. And now I saw, to my dismay, that by some means my mission had been betrayed! That man, Charles Baross, was an intimate associate of the fairylike Gisèle, one of the most noted dancers in Europe.

The few facts that had been given to me in that sombre old room in Downing Street were being rapidly borne out. Indeed, I now began to realise why I had been sent to Hungary upon that ill-defined and rather hare-brained mission.

But was it fool-hardy and hare-brained? For the first time I now realised the extreme importance of it all.

Presently, when I returned to Mademoiselle, I found her seated as I had left her, but apparently very bored.

"I suppose we had better be getting back," I remarked quite casually.

"Yes," she answered, rising. "But won't you have your coffee?"

"Thanks," I replied. "It's cold now—and I hate cold coffee," and I turned away.

I discerned her chagrin, and at the same time noticed old Baross at the further end of the long terrace watching intently.

That the fellow had put something into my coffee I knew! And I smiled within myself at my success in outwitting the pretty little dancer and her friend.

We motored back from Lepsény to her flat in Budapest. There I waited in the *salon* with that orange-shaded lamp while she changed her dress, and afterwards the car took us to the "Vampetits," close to the Town Park, where we dined in an arbour in the cool garden. She declared that she had had a most delightful day, and then I had to take her hurriedly to the Folies Caprice, where later I sat and watched her dance to the plaudits of the crowd.

I did not, however, overlook the fact that she had been party to a plot against me. That big brute, Baross, had drugged—or perhaps poisoned—my coffee with her connivance!

That fact showed me I had somehow been betrayed. By whom?

The chalk mark upon her door and her friendship with the mysterious Madame da Silva were both problems which set me thinking.

As I lay in bed in that colossal hotel, the Hungaria, that night, with the white eastern moon shining across the Danube full into my room I felt that, though I had discovered nothing definite yet, I was still in a quandary, and on that day I had been in distinct peril.

Mademoiselle had suggested our motor-trip together to Lake Balaton. Why? Because she intended to go to the Korona, which was apparently kept by one of her accomplices. And that accomplice had doctored my coffee!

As a cosmopolitan I am always wary of strangers. A long experience of the ways and means of international criminals, and a wide acquaintance with some of the most wily, ingenious and elusive of that fraternity have imbued me with a shrewd and constant suspicion. I accept nothing upon its true face value. First inquire and then decide is my motto.

That incident of trying to dope my coffee was, in itself, a small matter. But it revealed to me two facts, namely, that the pretty Gisèle was hand-in-glove with the fat hotel proprietor, and secondly, that she intended to clear herself at my expense of some suspicion which attached to her.

I did not allow the incident to deter me from further inquiry. The Chief had expressed certain suspicions to me, and these I was trying to confirm. Part confirmation I had already had in the attempt upon myself, it being evident that by some unknown means I had been betrayed.

If one attempt had proved futile, a second

["THE DANCER AT THE FOLIES CAPRICE" continued overleaf.]

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would no doubt be made. Hence I continued during the following three weeks to dance attendance upon the pretty Gisèle, until I had become a daily visitor to her flat, and sat in the *salon* where the orange lamp-shade stood upon the small side table.

A fortnight passed. Each evening until a late hour I kept watch for Mademoiselle's visitors. They seemed to be numerous, and of both sexes. Madame da Silva called upon her nearly every night after her return from the theatre, and then, later, there would be other persons. Frequently the fellow, Baross, in his guise as a prosperous peasant, would arrive, and now and then the lamp with the orange shade would be shown in the window —sometimes only for a few minutes, and at others for an hour at a time. It was there as a warning sign.

One night, while I was keeping my lonely vigil, Baross had passed and entered the house, when following him quickly came the thin, emaciated old man who, pausing for a few seconds, again chalked the door and passed along into the darkness.

I crept up, and saw that the mark he had chalked there was not the double zero, but a small figure six.

Again I was on the alert, and my patience was presently rewarded by the passing of three elderly and rather ruffianly men, one of whom halted at the door and with a small flash lamp searched for the sign.

On seeing it he instantly rejoined his two companions with a whispered word, and all three hurried away as though seized by terror lest they should be discovered.

That Figure Six had evidently alarmed them. But why should that shabby, poverty-stricken man place it there and then efface himself?

Half-an-hour later Baross and another man emerged, a fact that was evidently known to the poverty-stricken individual, for they had not been gone ten minutes when I saw him approach and obliterate the sign.

I openly confess I was greatly puzzled. That some desperate conspiracy was in progress, and that the pretty little dancer was implicated in it, was quite plain. Besides, it became daily more apparent that the suspicions held by my Chief at Downing Street were well-founded.

But I was faced with a difficulty. The motive of my presence in Budapest was evidently known. How it had leaked out, I knew not. But the Hungarians, like the Italians, are a very wily race. Mademoiselle evidently knew that I was not a wealthy man, as she had at first believed. Because of that she had entered into the conspiracy against me.

Nevertheless, I continued to take her about on motor-drives and to restaurants, in order to disguise from her that I had suspicion of her evil intent. My one thought was to obtain confirmation of what had taken root in my mind. My instructions had been simply to proceed to Budapest, make the acquaintance of the popular dancer, spend money in entertaining her, and discover what I could.

Well, I had already discovered certain facts—facts which greatly puzzled me.

One day I took Mademoiselle to see the ice-cave at Dobsina—a long day's motoring —when, on my return, I received at my hotel a note from our secret agent, Böckh. He dared not approach me, but he had sent me the note by a street urchin, signed by the code word by which he was known at Whitehall.

When I read it I saw I was up against a very desperate conspiracy, and that the pretty dancer was being paid a very considerable sum to assist in the great plot.

With this knowledge I stood watching Mademoiselle's abode, when just after midnight a small motor-van drew up to the door, and from it descended two Hungarians—one of them being the hotel-keeper, Charles Baross, while his companion was the man I had first seen with him weeks before.

From the van they lifted a big easy-chair. Then Baross, having opened the door with a latchkey, they both carried the chair upstairs. They remained only a few minutes, when they presently emerged and drove away. I watched for nearly two hours afterwards, but Mademoiselle had no visitors. Therefore I returned to the hotel and slept till morning.

When next day at noon I entered Mademoiselle's *salon*, she suddenly exclaimed with a gay laugh:

"Now, what do you think of my new arm-chair?" and she pointed to a luxurious one covered in silk, striped gold and purple. "Sit in it and try it."

For answer I closed the door, and whipping out my automatic pistol, said very determinedly:

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I will accept your kind hospitality. I will sit in that chair for a moment, and then I shall leave this room and lock you in! There will be no need for you to light your warning lamp to-night or for anyone to place chalk-marks upon your door."

"What!" she cried, her face blanching to the lips.

"I mean what I say!" I replied, locking the door and placing the key in my pocket. "Now I will sit down!"

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"No, *mon Dieu!* No!" she shrieked. "Don't—don't!"

"But you invited me to sit down," I said grimly.

"I—I did—I—"

"And you intended then to leave me," I said in a hard voice. "But your game is up! The very act of sitting in that chair will set a time-fuse beneath, and presently you will be blown out of recognition just as you intended that I should be!"

She began to shriek, but I covered her with my revolver and compelled her to remain silent.

"But don't sit down! Don't sit down—I beg of you!" she cried, terrified.

"Mademoiselle," I replied very firmly, "only on one condition will I hesitate to turn the tables upon you. You will give me the present address of Henri Beaujon, whom I know to be in hiding somewhere in London, and also the names and addresses of your revolutionary committee—six of them!"

"But I—I cannot do that. I—"

"Then I shall accept your proffered hospitality and seat myself in that most inviting chair. Come!" I added. "I have no time to waste. Where is Beaujon?"

With a look of fierce hatred she still hesitated. Again I repeated my threat, adding:

"It was your intention to commit outrages in London, to cause disasters on certain underground railways, but this we intend to prevent. Now, where is Beaujon?"

"You will allow me to go free if I tell you?" she asked sullenly.

"Yes—if you also tell me the addresses of those six men who form the committee. That is my condition. Write them down for me," and I pointed to the little writing table set near the window.

She still hesitated, yet in her dark eyes shone a murderous hatred, for she knew that she was cornered.

"Remember! you will be watched, and if you give me any information which proves to be false you will be at once arrested upon an extradition warrant and brought to London for trial. You have not quite forgotten your last visit there—eh?"

"Won't you spare me?—won't you——"

"Spare you!" I echoed. "No. You tried to poison me out at Korona, and now you have tried to kill me by violent means. Just write those addresses if you wish your life spared."

She sank into the writing-chair and very reluctantly penned what I wanted.

"Thank you," I said, taking the paper from her hand. "Remember, however, what to expect if you have deceived me. And now, if I were you, I would get rid of that very inviting chair, for you may find it distinctly dangerous."

Within half-an-hour I had telegraphed the seven addresses to Downing Street, and by four o'clock that afternoon the notorious Henri Beaujon, head of the great plot to cause terrible disasters in London, as well as his six associates, all desperate foreigners, had been arrested, two of them in Manchester, and the remainder in London.

The addresses Mademoiselle had given me proved in each instance to be correct, therefore the extradition warrant was not put into force. Thus the intended series of explosions upon the railways in London and the vicinity were effectually prevented, though I certainly owed my life to the timely information sent to me by our secret agent, Karl Böckh.

Since then I have often reflected how puzzled I was by those warning chalk-marks—ciphers which that desperate revolutionary group could read and heed.

A SONG OF THE ROAD.

A stone for a pillow,
A field for a bed,
A blackbird to tell me when it's morning;
The wind blowing cool
As the water in the pool,
And the road gleaming ghostly in the dawning.

The sun for a guide,
The world for a book—
The flowers by the way for its adorning;
Oh, I hope when I die
It will be 'neath the sky,
In the dawn of a soft summer's morning!

M. Dean.

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Mr. Editor—His Page.

18 *Henrietta Street,*
London, W.C. 2.
12-11-20.

Christmas and the New Year.

To everyone who reads this a joyful Christmas and a happy New Year! It almost seems as if, by the beginning of 1921, we shall have laid the foundations of that new world which takes the place of one shattered into bits by war. This may sound wild optimism, but we are in that state when nothing but optimism is of any use. At the worst, to hope does no harm; at the best it accomplishes miracles.

May I quote a short passage from an American editorial, not because it is American, but because it is sense. The writer chose "Enthusiasm" for his title, and said:

"No task is mean to him who performs the labour his hands find to do with all his might. I asked the head of a great business the secret of his success, and he answered: 'I always whistled on my way to a job I didn't like. By doing things I hated to do the very best I knew how, I got a chance at better jobs.'

"Believe in something! Do something! Be somebody!"

In all the writings with which I am acquainted I cannot find a better New Year motto than that last line—"Believe in something! Do something! Be somebody!"

"To Let."

On page 180 *you will find the first instalment of the new serial by John Galsworthy. It recalls the opening scenes of what, as the story goes on, becomes a perfectly charming love idyll between Fleur and Jon. Some of the love passages between them are extraordinarily moving. I don't know any writer who has such wonderful sympathy with and understanding of youth as Mr. Galsworthy.*

That, possibly, is the secret of his appeal. The young love him because, being young, they value understanding sympathy more than anything in the world. Older people live their youth over again through his eyes.

I don't think anyone can help finding "To Let" a very beautiful story.

Two Hints.

The Editor of Pearson's Magazine *asks me to say that a new and virile sea-story, "Black Pawl," by Ben Ames Williams, appears in the Christmas number, now on sale.*

Mr. Williams' work may not be very well known, but he is a great discovery. The sheer power of the story will, my colleague is convinced, justify him in the minds of readers in proclaiming it great fiction.

The fact that it only extends to four vigorous, quick-moving instalments is its only fault. Every lover of a good sea yarn will wish that it were longer.

"*Letters to Felicia*," *which appeared serially in the* Royal, *are now on sale in book form, with the original illustrations by A. K. Macdonald, price* 3*s.* 6*d. net. If your Bookseller cannot supply a copy, send* 3*s.* 9*d. to the Book Publisher,* 17 *Henrietta Street, London, W.C.* 2.

This volume makes a charming gift for a girl one doesn't know quite well enough to trouble with a diamond necklace, yet whose Christmas or New Year cannot be allowed to pass without some token of esteem.

Don't forget to take home:

Every Monday - -	Pearson's Weekly, Home Notes.
Every Tuesday - -	Peg's Paper.
Every Thursday - -	Smallholder, Scout.
22nd of the Month -	The Novel Magazine.
1st of Month - - -	Pearson's Magazine, Home Cookery.

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Photo Fowlsham & Bamfield.

Although Edna Best is usually brimming over with fun and good spirits, she takes her profession very seriously and puts in a lot of hard study.

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Patter about Peter Pan.

A Double Turn by Edna Best *and* William Pollock.

At the moment of going to press it was announced that Miss Edna Best would play Peter Pan in London this year. As Peter Pan is a national classic and Miss Edna Best the personification of triumphant youth, the two together are irresistible.—Ed. R. M.

THE second time I met Edna Best—she allows me to leave out the Miss—she was in the lobby just through the stage door of St. James's Theatre, S.W. It was between a *matinée* and an evening performance of *Uncle Ned*, in which she was playing with Mr. Henry Ainley, and we (Edna Best, not Henry Ainley, and I) were seated on a wooden form earnestly discussing something to do with young actresses, who suddenly burst forth as star performers.

All at once, I happened to catch sight of one of her arms. The day was a pleasant spring one, on which lambs were doubtless gambolling gaily, but the arm of Edna Best seemed blue to my solicitous eye.

"Look here," I said, with an attempt at masculine masterfulness which never has any effect on 1920 girls, "you are cold. You ought to have a coat, or a—er—jumper, or something on."

She looked at me with that pitying, feminine contempt which I shall never learn not to feel exceeding small under.

"Cold?" she remarked, rubbing the contentious limb, "not a bit of it. I'm not cold; I'm mottled. That's youth."

"That's youth!" . . . It did not

Photo *Fradelham & Banfield.*

This year's Peter Pan shares the immortal Peter's most charming attribute—she absolutely refuses to grow up!

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Compton Collier.

Edna Best loves tennis and swimming, and judging by her expectant look, fruit also!

occur to me at the time, but these two words crystallise Edna Best. She is youth *in excelsis*; youth with all its captivating allure; youth to the *n*-th, The Girl Who Won't Grow Up.

Exactly the young woman to play Peter Pan, who, as you will recall, is similarly happily built. If you have ever seen Edna Best, and I hope for your good pleasure you have spent tomboyish times with her in *Uncle Ned* or *Brown Sugar*, or both, you will agree with me and—Sir James Barrie.

I asked her what happened when she was taken to see Sir James before she got the part of Peter Pan, for he makes it a rule to get to know prospective Peters before any contract is given to them.

"It was awfully interesting. He talked quite a lot, and ended up by saying he hoped I should some day play in a piece of his.

"'That means good-bye to my chance of playing Peter Pan,' I thought to myself on leaving him. But I was wrong again; and the next thing I knew was that the part was mine for the playing this Christmas. What do you think of that?"

I don't think—I mean I don't know what to think. Barrie always baffles me.

But it does not matter two hoots what I think. This article is supposed to be about Edna Best, so let us stick to her.

Born in Brighton, she is in her twentieth year. From this you might reasonably deduce she will be twenty-one twelve months hence. But for once your reasoning will be wrong. When they are twenty-one people come of age; grow up. If growing up means throwing off youth, I beg to give it as my considered opinion here and now that Edna Best will not be twenty-one for a very long time.

I am ignoring mere birthdays. Anyone can have birthdays; I've had lots. But I never met anyone so impervious to them as Edna Best. She hasn't a line on her high forehead, a wrinkle round either of her eyes of very uncommon deep blue, a scar on her buoyant outlook.

The dear, kind lady who recently wrote to her from Kew, beginning, as they all do, "My dear child," wasted two precious stamps on her letter.

"She wanted me to buy some bees," Edna Best explained to me. "Said they were immortal, and that if I purchased them from her and set up as a bee-keeper in my spare time I should keep young and live for ever. She didn't say what would be the remedy if they didn't like my face and decided to sting me to death one day."

Edna Best's spare time is fully occupied

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Photo Foulsham & Banfield.

Blowing soap bubbles is a very entrancing occupation—and a very becoming one when the 1920 Peter Pan officiates.

without any everlasting bees to buzz around. She swims, she plays lawn tennis, and, above all, she studies. Her head has not been turned by the extraordinary progress she has made. The fact that in about nine months she has jumped from an unknown little girl into one of London's most popular leading ladies has left her perfectly sane.

She is not above taking lessons in acting. Here is a true secret about her. No sooner had she fixed to play Peter Pan than off she went to that fine actress and coach, Miss Kate Rorke, to, as she told me, "study technique and get rid of some of my bad points and habits." As the Governor of North Carolina might have observed to the

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Photo Compton Collie.

Her sudden leap into fame has not turned Edna Best's head in the least—both on the stage and off she is just a lovable, unaffected girl.

Governor of South Carolina: "Can you beat ut?"

Lest I forget, I had better here tell how Edna Best has got where she has. I put it on record, not as an incitement to stage-obsessed lassies, but as a statement of facts. Let us hearken to the voice of E. B., who, looking at us out of her wide-open eyes, speaks thus:

"I don't think I really ought to count my first engagement. It wasn't official, you see. I knew a girl in the chorus at Daly's. One day she told me there were one or two vacancies for girls, and suggested I should apply.

"Being an impulsive child, I listened to the voice of the temptress, and got taken on. Then came the hard part. I was afraid to tell them about it at home, and so had to invent the most ingenious stories to get away to the theatre in the evening.

"The stock of stories (oh, yes, I know, but that's what I'm going to call them, and for goodness' sake don't keep on interrupting) came to an end in a week, and I was discovered. That was the end of my clandestine career in musical comedy.

"But I had set the ball rolling, and presently I was allowed to wangle a job in *Charley's Aunt*. After that, chance and luck—oh, I've had lots of luck!—pushed me along. One day I happened to go to the Prince of Wales' Theatre to see a friend of mine who was acting there.

"On the way down to her I happened to bump into an American. One thing led to another, and before I knew what was happening, he had told me he was looking everywhere for an understudy for Miss Fay Compton, and that he guessed I would do for the someone all right—all right.

"It was a lucky bump. I hadn't an engagement at the time, and I was sent to understudy Fay in *Fair and Warmer*—and there you are."

There Edna Best is, rather. The dramatic critic of a London morning newspaper was actually the first person to spot her from the stalls. On the morning after the night before—no; that's wrong—on the morning after the first night of *Uncle Ned* he hailed her as "London's new funny girl," and ever since then she has held her own—more than

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Photo Foulsham & Banfield.

She began he career in musical comedy, and later understudied Miss Fay Compton in *Fair and Warmer*.

held her own—as a young woman with a most attractive sense of bubbling fun, an irresistible hoydenishness, and a naturalness as rare and refreshing as the fabulous fruit once referred to by Mr. Lloyd George in some political connection.

To my mind, the great thing about Edna Best is that she is herself on the stage—a lovable, independent, unaffected girl. This has the merit of being both complimentary and true.

It will give you some extra limelight on "herself" if I tell you her idea of very young women of the moment generally, for with much cunning I led her down the path that sets woman talking about woman, and we wandered into a turning marked "Flappers—Dangerous."

"I don't like them," said Edna Best. "They ought to be—what's the word?"

"Brought up for judgment if called up——," I began helpfully.

"Suppressed," she interrupted. "Thank goodness I've grown out of being one. You've no idea how boring it was."

I shuddered.

"Oh, you needn't agree with me if you don't want to," she went on, "but it's true. Ask anyone who's grown out of being a flapper. Why, when I was one I thought, for example, that mother had the weirdest ideas about what clothes I ought to wear. Now I know that the weird ideas were mine.

"Take flappers—most flappers, anyhow—and men. You know how they flirt."

"I do not," I said dignifiedly.

"Well, they do. They don't mean a thing by it, but it's very cheap all the same."

One thing is certain, at any rate; only a very young woman would dare to talk about other young women thus frankly.

It just shows you once more how really young Edna Best is.

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Coming into the lounge from the far end, he at once saw Fleur where he had left her. She sat with crossed knees, slowly balancing a foot in silk stocking and grey shoe, sure sign that she was dreaming. [*Page 257, col. 1.*]

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"To Let."

By John Galsworthy.

Illustrated by W. Hatherell, R.I.

Picture the feelings of a man whose daughter, the apple of his eye, adores the son of his divorced wife—the only woman he ever really loved—and you begin to realise the dramatic possibilities of this remarkable story. That was the problem faced by Soames Forsyte, destined thereafter to be torn between affection for his girl and wounded pride. The infinite possibilities of this situation are handled with superb insight by Mr. Galsworthy in what is undoubtedly his masterpiece. "To Let" is sequel to "The Man of Property," "Indian Summer of a Forsyte" (in the volume "Five Tales"), "In Chancery," and "Awakening," and concludes "The Forsyte Saga."

PART I.

I.

ENCOUNTER.

SOAMES FORSYTE emerged from the Knightsbridge Hotel where he was staying, in the afternoon of the 12th May, 1920, with the intention of visiting a collection of pictures in a Gallery off Cork Street and looking into the Future. He walked. Since the War he never took a cab if he could help it. Their drivers were, in his view, an uncivil lot, though now that the War was over and supply beginning to exceed demand again, getting more civil in accordance with the custom of human nature. Still, he had not forgiven them, deeply identifying them with gloomy memories and, like all members of their class, with revolution.

The considerable anxiety he had passed through during the War, and the more considerable anxiety he had since undergone in the Peace, had produced psychological consequences in a tenacious nature. He had, in mind, so frequently experienced ruin, that he had ceased to believe in its material probability. When one paid away four thousand a year in income and super-tax one could not very well be worse off. A fortune of a quarter of a million, encumbered only by a wife and one daughter, and very diversely invested, afforded substantial guarantee even against that "wild-cat notion"—a levy on capital. And as to confiscation of war profits he was entirely in favour of it, for he had none, and "serve the beggars right."

The price of pictures, moreover, had, if anything, gone up, and he had done better with his collection since the War began than ever before. Air raids, also, had acted beneficially on a spirit congenitally cautious and hardened a character already dogged. To be in danger of being entirely dispersed inclined one to be less apprehensive of the more partial dispersions involved in levies and taxation, while the habit of condemning the impudence of the Germans had led naturally to condemning that of Labour, if not openly, at least in the sanctuary of one's soul.

He walked. There was, moreover, time to spare, for Fleur was to meet him at the Gallery at four o'clock, and it was as yet but half-past two. It was good for him to walk, his liver was a little constricted and his nerves rather on edge. His wife was always out when she was in Town, and his daughter *would* flibberty-gibbet all over the place like all young women since the War. Still, he must be thankful that she had been too young to do anything in that War itself. Not, of course, that he had not supported the War from its inception with all his soul, but between that and supporting it with the bodies of his wife and daughter there had been a gap fixed by something old-fashioned in his soul which abhorred emotional extravagance.

He had, for instance, strongly objected to Annette, so attractive and, in 1914, only thirty-five, going to her native France, her "*chère patrie*" as, under the stimulus of war she had begun to call it, to nurse her "*braves poilus*" forsooth! Ruining her health and her looks! As if she were really a nurse! He had put a stopper on it. Let her do needlework at home, or knit! She had not gone, therefore, and had never been quite the same woman since. A bad tendency of hers to mock at him, not openly, but in continual little ways, had grown. As for Fleur, the War had resolved the vexed problem whether or not she should go to school. She was

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"Of course, Auntie June, . . . it's jolly good of you to encourage them. Only—hang it all!"—

better away from her mother in her war mood, from the chance of air raids, and the impetus to do extravagant things; so he had placed her in a seminary as far West as had seemed to him compatible with excellence and had missed her horribly.

Fleur! He had never regretted the somewhat outlandish name by which at her birth

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— Soames stole a glance. Irene's startled eyes were bent watchfully on her boy. She—she had these devotions . . . for that boy's father—for this boy! [Page 254, col. 1.]

he had decided so suddenly to call her—marked concession though it had been to the French. Fleur! A pretty name—a pretty child! But restless—too restless; and wilful! Knowing her power, too, over her father! Soames often reflected on the mistake it was to dote on one's daughter. To get old and dote! Sixty-five! He was getting

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on; but he didn't feel it, for, fortunately perhaps, considering Annette's youth and good looks, his second marriage had turned out a cool affair. He had known but one real passion in his life for that first wife of his—Irene. Yes, and that fellow, his Cousin Jolyon, who had gone off with her, was looking very shaky, they said. No wonder, at seventy-two, after twenty years of a third marriage!

Soames paused a moment in his march to lean over the railings of the Row. Thanks to abstemious habits he had not grown fat and flabby; his nose was pale and thin, his grey moustache close-clipped, his eyesight unimpaired. A slight stoop closened and corrected the expansion given to his face by the heightening of his forehead in the recession of his grey hair. Little change had time wrought in the "warmest" of the young Forsytes, as the last of the old Forsytes—Timothy—now in his hundredth and first year, would have phrased it.

The shade from the plane trees fell on his neat Homburg hat; he had given up top hats—it was no use attracting attention to wealth in days like these. Plane trees! His thoughts travelled sharply to Madrid, where, on his quest of knowledge about Goya, the Easter before the War, he had commissioned a copy of a fresco painting called "La Vendimia," wherein was the figure of a girl with an arm akimbo, who had reminded him of his daughter. He had it now in the Gallery at Mapledurham, and rather poor it was—you couldn't copy Goya. He would still look at it, however, if his daughter were not there, for the sake of something irresistibly reminiscent in the light, erect balance of the figure, the width between the arching eyebrows, the eager dreaming of the dark eyes. Curious that Fleur should have dark eyes, when his own were grey—no pure Forsyte had brown eyes—and her mother's blue! But, of course, her grandmother Lamotte had eyes as dark as treacle!

He began to walk on again towards Hyde Park Corner, noting on his way, with a certain disgust, its lack of distinction. A democratic England, now — dishevelled, hurried, noisy, and seemingly without an apex. And that something fastidious in the soul of Soames turned over within him. Gone for ever, the close borough of rank and polish! Wealth there was—oh, yes! wealth—he himself was a richer man than his father had ever been; but manners, flavour, quality, all gone, engulfed in one vast, ugly, shoulder-rubbing, petrol-smelling Cheerio. Little half-beaten pockets of gentility and caste lurking here and there, dispersed and *chétif*, as Annette would say; but nothing ever again firm and coherent to look up to. And into this new hurly-burly of bad manners and loose morals his daughter—flower of his life—was flung! And when those Labour chaps got power—if they ever did—the worst was yet to come!

He passed out under the archway, at last no longer—thank goodness!—disfigured by the gun-grey of its searchlight, and directed his steps along the Club fronts of Piccadilly. George Forsyte, of course, would be sitting in the bow-window of the Iseeum. The chap was so big now, that he was there nearly all his time, like some immovable, sardonic, humorous eye noting the decline of men and things. Yes, there he was, tall, ponderous, neat, clean-shaven, with his smooth hair, hardly turned, smelling, no doubt, of the best hair-wash, and a pink paper in his hand. Well, *he* didn't change! And for perhaps the first time in his life Soames felt a kind of sympathy tapping in his waistcoat for that sardonic kinsman. With his weight, his perfectly-parted hair, and bull-like gaze, he was a guarantee that the old order would take some shifting yet. He saw George move the pink paper as if inviting him to ascend—the chap must want to ask something about his property. It was still under Soames' control; for in the adoption of a sleeping partnership at that painful period twenty years back when he had divorced Irene, Soames had found himself almost insensibly retaining control of all purely Forsyte affairs.

Hesitating for just a moment, he nodded and went in. Since the death of his brother-in-law, Montague Dartie, in Paris, which no one had quite known what to make of—except that it was certainly not suicide—the Iseeum Club had seemed more respectable to Soames. George, too, he knew, had sown the last of his wild oats, and was committed definitely to the joys of the table, eating only of the very best so as to keep his weight down, and owning, as he said, "only one or two old screws to give me an interest in life." He joined his cousin, therefore, in the bay window without the embarrassing sense of indiscretion he had been used to feel up there. George put out a well kept hand.

"Haven't seen you since the War," he said. "How's your wife?"

"Thanks," said Soames coldly, "well enough."

Some hidden jest curved, for a moment, George's fleshy face, and gloated from his eye.

"That Belgian chap, Profond," he said, "is a member here now. He's a rum customer."

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"Quite!" muttered Soames. "What did you want to see me about?"

"Old Timothy; he might go off the hooks at any moment. I suppose he's made his will?"

"Yes."

"Well, you or somebody ought to give him a look up—last of the old lot; he's a hundred, you know. They say he's like a mummy. Where are you goin' to put him? He ought to have a pyramid by rights."

Soames shook his head. "Highgate," he said; "the family vault."

"Well, I suppose you're right; the old girls would miss him, if there's anything in that. They say he still takes an interest in food. He might last on, you know. Don't we *get* anything for the old Forsytes? Ten of them—average age eighty-eight—I worked it out. That ought to be equal to triplets."

"Is that all?" said Soames. "I must be getting on."

"You unsociable devil," George's eyes seemed to say. "Yes, that's all; look him up in his mausoleum—the old chap might want to prophesy."

And as Soames retired he resumed his seat in the bay window.

Arriving at the Gallery off Cork Street, Soames paid his shilling, picked up a catalogue, and entered. Some ten persons were prowling round. Soames took steps and came on what looked to him like a lamp-post bent by collision with a motor omnibus. It was advanced some three paces from the wall, and was described in the catalogue as "Jupiter." He examined it with curiosity, having recently turned some of his attention to sculpture. "If that's Jupiter," he thought, "I wonder what Juno's like." And suddenly he saw her, opposite. She appeared to him like nothing so much as a pump with two handles, lightly clad in snow. He was still gazing at her, when two of the prowlers halted on his left.

"*Epatant!*" he heard one say, "there's future in that!"

"Jargon!" growled Soames to himself.

The other's boyish voice replied:

"Missed it, old bean; he's pulling your leg. When Jove and Juno created he them, he was saying: 'I'll see how much these fools will swallow.' And they've lapped up the lot."

"You young duffer! Vospovitch is an innovator. Don't you see that he's brought satire into sculpture? The future of plastic art, of music, painting, and even architecture, has set in satiric. It was bound to. People are tired—the bottom's tumbled out of sentiment."

"Well, I'm quite equal to taking a little interest in beauty. I was through the War. You've dropped your handkerchief, sir."

Soames saw a handkerchief held out in front of him. He took it with some natural suspicion, and approached it to his nose. It had the right scent—of distant Eau de Cologne—and initials in a corner. Slightly reassured, he raised his eyes to the young man's face. It had rather fawn-like ears, a laughing mouth, with half a toothbrush growing out of it on each side, and small, lively eyes, above a normally-dressed appearance.

"Thank you," he said, and, moved by a sort of irritation, added: "Glad to hear you like beauty; that's rare nowadays."

"I dote on it," said the young man, "but you and I are the last of the old guard, sir."

Soames smiled.

"If you really care for pictures," he said, "here's my card. I can show you some quite good ones any Sunday, if you're down the river and care to look in."

"Awfully nice of you, sir. I'll drop in like a bird. My name's Mont—Michael." And he took off his hat.

Soames, already regretting his impulse, raised his own slightly in response, with a downward look at the young man's companion, who had a purple tie, dreadful little slug-like whiskers, and a scornful look, as if he were a poet.

It was the first indiscretion he had committed for so long, that he went and sat down in an alcove. What had possessed him to give his card to a rackety young fellow who went about with a thing like that? And Fleur, always at the back of his thoughts, started out like a filigree figure from a clock when the hour strikes. On the screen opposite the alcove was a large canvas with a great many square, tomato-coloured blobs on it, and nothing else, so far as Soames could see from where he sat. He looked at his catalogue: "No. 32—'The Future Town'—Paul Post."

Expressionism! They were all Expressionists now, he had heard, on the Continent. So it was coming here too, was it? He remembered the first wave of influenza in 1887—or 8—hatched in China, so they said. He wondered where this—this Expressionism had been hatched. The thing was like a disease!

He had become conscious of a woman and a youth standing between him and the "Future Town." Their backs were turned; but very suddenly Soames put his catalogue before his face, and, drawing his hat forward,

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gazed through the slit between. No mistaking that back, elegant as ever, though the hair above had gone grey. Irene! His divorced wife—Irene! And this, no doubt, was her son—by that fellow Jolyon Forsyte—their boy, six months older than his own girl! And mumbling over in his mind the bitter days of his divorce, he rose to get out of sight, but quickly sat down again. She had turned her head to speak to her boy; her profile was still so youthful that it made her grey hair seem powdery, as if fancy-dressed; and her lips were smiling as Soames, first possessor of them, had never seen them smile.

Grudgingly he admitted her still beautiful, and in figure almost as young as ever. And how that boy smiled back at her! Emotion squeezed Soames' heart. The sight infringed his sense of justice. He grudged her that boy's smile—it went beyond what Fleur gave him, and it was undeserved. Their son might have been his son; Fleur might have been Irene's daughter, if she had kept straight! He lowered his catalogue. If she saw him, all the better! A reminder of her conduct in the presence of her son, who probably knew nothing of it, would be a salutary touch from the finger of that Nemesis which surely must soon or late visit her! Then, half-conscious that such a thought was extravagant for a Forsyte of his age, Soames took out his watch. Past four! Fleur was late. She had gone to his niece, Imogen Cardigan's, and there they would keep her smoking cigarettes and gossiping, and that. He heard the boy laugh, and say eagerly: "I say, Mum, this isn't by one of Auntie June's lame ducks, is it?"

"Paul Post—I believe it is, darling."

The word produced a little shock in Soames; he had never heard her use it. And then she saw him. His eyes must have had in them something of George Forsyte's sardonic look; for her gloved hand crisped the folds of her frock, her eyebrows rose, her face went stony. She moved on.

"It *is* a caution," said the boy, catching her arm again.

Soames stared after them. That boy was good-looking, with a Forsyte chin, and eyes deep-grey, deep in; but with something sunny, like a glass of old sherry spilled over him; his smile, perhaps, his hair. Better than they deserved—those two! They passed from his view into the next room, and Soames continued to regard the Future Town, and saw it not. A little smile snarled up his lips. He was despising the vehemence of his own feelings after all these years. Ghosts! And yet as one grew old—was there anything but what was ghost-like left?

Yes, there was Fleur! He fixed his eyes on the entrance. She was due; but she would keep him waiting, of course! And suddenly he became aware of a sort of human breeze—a short, slight form clad in a sea-green djibbah with a metal belt and a fillet binding unruly red-gold hair all streaked with grey. She was talking to the gallery attendants, and something familiar riveted his gaze—in her eyes, her chin, her hair, her spirit—something which suggested a thin Skye terrier just before its dinner. Surely June Forsyte! His cousin June—and coming straight to his recess! She sat down beside him, deep in thought, took out a tablet and made a pencil note. Soames sat unmoving. A confounded thing was cousinship! "Disgusting!" he heard her murmur; then, as if resenting the presence of an overhearing stranger, she looked at him. The worst had happened.

"What—Soames!"

Soames turned his head a very little.

"How are *you?*" he said. "Haven't seen you for twenty years."

"No. Whatever made *you* come here?"

"My sins," said Soames. "What stuff!"

"Stuff? Oh! yes—of course; it hasn't *arrived* yet."

"It never will," said Soames; "it must be making a dead loss."

"Of course it is."

"How d'you know?"

"It's my Gallery."

Soames sniffed from sheer surprise.

"Yours? What on earth made you run a show like this?"

"*I* don't treat art as if it were grocery."

Soames pointed to the Future Town. "Look at that! Who's going to live in a town like that, or with it on his walls?"

June contemplated the picture for a moment. "It's a vision," she said.

"The deuce!" said Soames.

There was a silence, then June rose. "Crazy looking creature!" he thought.

"Well," he said, "you'll find your young step-brother here with a woman I used to know. If you take my advice, you'll close this exhibition."

June looked back at him. "Oh! You Forsyte!" she said, and moved on. About her light, fly-away figure, passing so suddenly away, was a look of dangerous decisions. Forsyte! Of course he was a Forsyte! And so was she! But from the time when, as a mere girl, she brought Bosinney into his life to wreck it, he had never hit it off with June—and never would! And here

("*TO LET*" *is continued on page 253.*)

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An Old Flame.

By
Fanny Heaslip Lea.

Illustrated by
Neale Ordayne.

I.

If the letter had been different—but it was in its way, of course, doubtless a difficult letter to write. Jim Lawrence had re-read it several times before he gave it to Adrienne.

He took it home with him late in the afternoon from his office at Headquarters in the great, grey pile of the Young Hotel Building, and dropped it into Adrienne's lap. The effect to be achieved was casualness, a mixture of surprise and resignation.

"Here's a letter," he said, when he had kissed Adrienne twice, though not, of course, with any idea of propitiation, "from an old friend of mine—came today. Remember hearing me speak of Blanche Thornton, honey? Well, it seems she's on her way back to the States from Shanghai—coming through on the transport to-morrow, y'know—and she's sent us a line by a Pacific Mail boat

As for Adrienne, she sat back . . . frankly adoring the music—or was it the musician? (Page 194, col. 2.)

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going through just ahead of her to let us know, eh? What d'y' think? Better meet her and have her out to dinner, I'm afraid——"

He knew at once, with an appalled sense of thin ice, that "afraid" was the wrong word, but he had sense enough to let it be, and continued lightly: "Nothing on for to-morrow night, have we?"

"No, dear, not a thing," said Adrienne, smiling up at him.

Then she read the letter. She read it aloud, which only accented its more delicate aspects, but Jim couldn't very well stop her. He undid the collar of his khaki shirt while he waited, and heaved a sigh of physical relief, the merest trifle overdone.

"Nice clear hand she writes," murmured Adrienne gently. "'Dear Jim, I come like water and like wind I go! Once again it's across your path—your straight and narrow path. "No more lingering in pleasant by-ways . . . the road leads straight and dusty to the grave . . ." or have you forgotten your R. L. S.? In any case, I'm sailing on the *Sherman*, which gets out a day after this, and I should so like to see you. You'll know from that end when we're due and all the rest of it. I've been in Shanghai mostly, the last year, reasonably well amused, but my affairs back home seem to have tangled themselves nicely, and I'm implored to come and straighten them out. I loathe the sea. If you don't get me ashore at Honolulu for a breathing-space, I shall think that marriage has spoilt you and that you aren't any longer the most—considerate?'—is that it?"

"Let's see. Yes, 'considerate,' that's it," said Jim with a slight cough.

"'—considerate man in the world,'" read Adrienne in her soft, pretty voice, "'which you may remember I always contended you were. Really, Jim, I am wanting very much to see you, and I do so want to know Elizabeth——'"

At which point Adrienne stopped again, arching her delicate eyebrows, widening shy brown eyes, and rounding her childish, pink mouth to a question. "Elizabeth?"

Jim Lawrence coughed again, not deeply, merely some annoying affection of the vocal chords. "She means you."

"Oh!" said Adrienne. "She means me? How funny!"

"Can't think why she should make such a ridiculous mistake," said Jim.

"We sent her our wedding cards, didn't we, Jimmy?"

"Of course we did; but you see, honey, that was almost a year ago."

Adrienne nodded thoughtfully. She began to read again and stopped to inquire abruptly: "Jimmy, did you ever know anyone named Elizabeth?"

"Bless me, no," returned her husband with great heartiness.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Always disliked the name."

"Don't you think it's rather stupid of Mrs. Thornton to make a mistake like that?"

"Oh, Blanche isn't stupid, by a long shot!" said Jim, and instantly regretted throwing any stronger light upon the fact. He added hastily: "You'll like her; I know you will!"

Leaving that open to discussion, Adrienne went back to the letter which, having paid its compliments to Elizabeth, finished abruptly, "*Hasta la vista, senor, y con todo*, Blanche."

"She doesn't sign her full name?" asked Adrienne.

"Well, you see, we were very good friends," said Jim.

"And Jimmy, why is she travelling on a transport? Isn't Major Thornton dead?"

"Well, her father's in the army—old army family, and all that."

"Do you know her people?"

"No, never saw 'em."

"You knew her at San Diego, didn't you, dear?"

"Yes, San Diego, two or three years ago, when Andy and I—Andy and I used to see quite a bit of her," Jim admitted generously. Having bethought himself of Andy, he used his absent friend something in the fashion of a smoke-screen, deploying behind him with a certain amount of safety.

"Did Andy like her?"

"Oh, yes! Old Andy was crazy about her."

"Jimmy, does she speak Spanish? What does that bit at the end mean?"

"Just—just a kind of *au revoir*. Spaniards are great boys for ceremony y'know! She probably picked that up from—Andy—or somebody else. Don't think she spoke it."

"I see," said Adrienne. She put the letter back into its grey-lined envelope and returned it daintily to Lawrence's outstretched hand. "Shall we have Mrs. Thornton to dinner, then? When does the transport get in?"

"Gets in about five o'clock to-morrow afternoon," Captain Lawrence announced cheerfully, almost with an undertone of relief.

He went on buoyantly, lifted on the returning tide of marital self-confidence:

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"We'll meet the *Sherman* and bring Blanche right up here."

"I'd rather stay at home and see that things are just right," said Adrienne, shaking he brown head thoughtfully. "You shall meet her, Jimmy. And I'll ask Andy to dinner, I think, to make an even number. The transport sails next morning?"

"About ten o'clock, probably."

"Then we must ask Mrs. Thornton to stay the night. It will be a rest for her."

"You are a little angel!" cried the grateful husband. He kissed the little angel in a way to endanger any halo.

"You know how anxious I am to know all your old friends," said Adrienne sweetly. "Now, aren't you going to get your tub and shave, dear? We're dining with the General, remember."

While the hot water was streaming into the tub with a torrential noisiness sufficient to cover and obliterate any lesser sounds, and while the mask of lather on her husband's handsome face was freshly creaming, thus confining him to the precincts of the bath-room for ten minutes at least, Adrienne sat down to the telephone in the little room just off the dining-room and called a number. It was a familiar number and required no assistance from the telephone book.

"Andy?" she said after a moment, very softly, but then Adrienne's voice was never anything but soft, with the sweetest little slurring consonants and hesitant final g's. "Andy, this is Adrienne."

Then she smiled into the receiver. "You're so nice, Andy; you always do know. I can't stop to talk. I'm dreadfully rushed. I wanted to ask you something, that's all. Andy, shall you be at the General's dinner to-night?"

Obviously Andy would.

"Ah!" said Adrienne with a long breath of relief. "I *am* so glad! And Andy—*do* you think you could manage to be next me at the table? The General is so fond of you—and young Blake, his aide-de-camp. Wouldn't they—couldn't you fix it somehow?"

At this point she blushed before an eager crackle of assurance from the impersonal vulcanite of the instrument. "Oh, thank you, Andy!" said Adrienne. "It's really rather important. I want to talk to you about something. I knew you wouldn't mind my asking you."

Only three guests were before them in the bachelor General's very delightful quarters—Andy, Lieutenant Blake, and the General's widowed sister, Mrs. Rathbone, who sometimes acted as hostess for him upon such occasions.

Adrienne spoke for a smiling moment to the General, made her compliments to Mrs. Rathbone, who kissed the smooth cheek affectionately, gave a shy, friendly hand to Lieutenant Blake, who could frankly have done with even more attention, and came at last to Andy Garret, standing a trifle apart from the others, turning over the leaves of a book in which he felt not the slightest interest—and waiting.

"Andy!" said Adrienne.

She gave him her hand and he pretended with a gallant bit of swagger to press a kiss upon the warm little fingers. Jim was at the farther end of the room, still talking to General Maynard.

"Well, Adrienne!" said Andy. "You look like a million to night."

Andy was not so tall as Jim. His crisply-curling blond head topped Adrienne's by nothing like so lordly a distance. He had keen grey eyes with thick, sandy brows and lashes, a nose aristocratically straight, a chin unexpectedly firm and a mouth—Andy's mouth wrote the secret of his soul across his clean-skinned, sunburnt face. It was a wide mouth, a trifle full-lipped perhaps, but without any of the slackness which big mouths so often show, and it went crooked at one corner. When he smiled Lucrezia Borgia would have trusted him with the half of her kingdom, and he usually smiled when he spoke to Adrienne.

"Well," he said again, "troops mobilised and in readiness, awaiting your highness' orders. What's the *pilikia*?"

"*Pilikia*" is the Hawaiian word for trouble. Adrienne had learnt it in the first devious month of housekeeping, from her servants. She smiled in return, but with a reserve of mysterious distress.

"Andy," she announced abruptly, "Mrs. Thornton's coming on the transport to-morrow." She drew back and waited, eyeing him closely.

"Blanche Thornton?" said Andy. He whistled softly between his teeth.

"You—you and Jimmy knew her at San Diego, didn't you?"

"Yes, yes," said Andy in a creditably colourless voice.

"You—were you very fond of her, Andy?"

"'Fond' is an elastic sort of word."

"Jimmy says that you—and he—saw quite a bit of her."

"Yes," said Andy with the shadow of a grimace. "I—and he—did. Well, well! Wrote him she was coming, I suppose?"

"He got the letter to-day by a Pacific Mail boat. Andy, I wish you could have seen that letter!"

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"Probably very like the one she wrote me," said Andy gravely.

"Did she write you one, truly?"

"No, strange to say, she didn't."

"That's queer," said Adrienne with a troubled ghost of a sigh, "because Jimmy says you were—rather crazy about her, you know, Andy."

"Makes it very odd," said Andy imperturbably interested. He cast an inscrutable glance at the back of Captain Lawrence's smooth, dark head. "Jimmy wants you to have her out at the house?"

"Oh, she writes inviting herself! We've simply got to do it. And then, too, I do like to be nice to Jimmy's old friends. She was a good friend of Jimmy's wasn't she, Andy?"

"Very good indeed," said Andy.

"I found a picture of her among some things just after we were married," Adrienne observed irrelevantly. "She's slender, isn't she, with a very pretty mouth, sad eyes, and a permanent wave?"

Andy made a sketchy gesture of felinity, grinning pleasantly.

"No, I'm not," denied Adrienne pathetically. "Truly, Andy, I didn't mean to be. It was beautifully done, her hair."

The arrival of other guests became apparent. An increasing clamour of conversation developed in the wide, high-ceilinged room. The fragrance of the roses which stood about in bowls and tall crystal vases beneath rose-shaded lamps diminished before the influx of other and less primitive perfumes.

"I'll show you the letter at dinner," Adrienne promised hurriedly. "Do you sit next——"

"Didn't you give your orders?"

She left him for less single-minded endeavour with a group of other women who had come together somehow just behind her.

At dinner, however, where she found Andy indeed upon her right and a hungry, and therefore disinterested, member of the Medical Corps upon her left, Adrienne repeated Mrs. Thornton's letter, word for word, to Andy's attentive ear.

"You see," she wound up breathlessly. "she reminds him of things. Does he remember his R. L. S.? I don't know if he does or not. I do. The part of that quotation she left out is, 'Once you are married——' Don't you remember it, Andy? 'Once you are married, the road leads straight and dusty to the grave. There is nothing for it, not even death, but to be good.'"

"I never cared for Stevenson much," said Andy thoughtfully. "Cheerful old bird, wasn't he?"

"But, Andy, she oughtn't to quote things like that to Jimmy now that he's a married man himself. It isn't very nice of her, do you think? And the bit about marriage spoiling him—as if he were something she had forgotten for a while and left out in the rain."

Andy broke into a stifled snort of laughter. Across the table Captain Lawrence, busy with the prettiest young thing imaginable, lifted a momentarily curious glance and smiled at Adrienne's absorption before returning to the charge. He knew the incredible simplicity of his wife and gloried in it as one might in another's capacity for oatmeal or rice-pudding, with no desire for emulation.

"The little angel!" he thought to himself fondly, "she's the most innocent thing in the world."

Andy's laughter broke off. He leant a little nearer Adrienne's slender shoulder, spoke in a humorous undertone:

"Jim pleased about her coming?"

"Why, yes. You—you were both so fond of her, weren't you, Andy?"

"Undoubtedly. Will she stay long?"

"I'm going to ask her for the night."

"H'mph!" said Andy cryptically.

Adrienne leant a little nearer in her turn. "You see," she said carefully, "we've been married eleven months now, and this is the first of Jimmy's—friends—I mean his women friends, Andy—and I do so want to be very, very nice to her. At the same time, I can't help wishing—just wishing, you know—that she weren't coming. Jimmy and I have been so awfully happy—so awfully, awfully happy—and she is sure to be much more worldly than I am—more sophisticated, you know, Andy—and they'll have a lot of things in common that I never heard of. That letter was full of—of reminders, and anything a woman will do in a letter she'll do twice as much of in person."

"You didn't learn that in the Convent of the Sacred Heart," said Andy with his lovable, one-sided smile.

"I'm not stupid, if I was brought up in a convent. I've read things. I've seen plays and I've seen Jimmy since that letter came!"

"What's he done?" inquired Andy. He looked at Captain Lawrence through the intervening roses and foliage with anything but a kindly interest.

"He's excited about it," said Adrienne. The soft voice was faintly unsteady. "It's a kind of adventure to him—romance, you know. He's very young about things like that, really. I suppose I shouldn't mind,

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but I do, I do, Andy, mind it terribly! When I think of her patronising me, as his little, silly, new wife that doesn't really know anything about him, that isn't capable of understanding him, that's good enough to keep his house but that will never know the most thrilling side of him—as she does—why, I just can't bear it, that's all!"

"My good child," said Andy tenderly, "wha ever have you been reading?" Then he saw that Adrienne's little hand playing desperately with her salad-fork was shaking, and he added in an entirely different tone of voice: "What is it you want me to do?"

"I—I want you to come to dinner to-morrow night," said Adrienne. She looked up at him and her eyes were full of tears.

Unostentatiously, Andy shoved an untouched glass of water forward. He said just above his breath: "Steady, honey-lamb!"—which, of course, he shouldn't have said, but the look in Adrienne's eyes had startled him out of his usual rather mocking neutrality. He added almost at once with an apologetic smile: "I said that exactly as if you had been my kid sister."

"I know you did," said Adrienne. "I liked it." Which, of course, relieved the moment of any suspicion of impropriety. She drank water and regained her pretty poise.

Andy fingered his napkin and thought deeply. Later on, about the middle of the next course, he said: "I think I can do it, if you'll let me, Adrienne. Were you ever in a play, or anything of the sort, while you were in school?"

"I used always to be the heroine," said Adrienne modestly. "They said I was rather good."

"Can you play up to my lead, if we stage a little comedy of our own while Mrs. Thornton is here?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure I could," said Adrienne gratefully. "Just tell me what to do."

"Let me be in love with you—eh?"

She flung him a startled glance. "For the time being," he explained hastily.

They regarded each other unsmiling. Deep in Adrienne's deer-like eyes a little spark flickered. She looked down at her plate.

"You'll come in after she gets there and kiss my hand, and say how terribly long it's been since you've seen me—and——"

"Not at all!" said Andy firmly. "I'll be discovered, when she arrives, kissing your hand in the pantry—helping with the butter-pats and flowers and things. Your tame cat, madam! Your devoted slave. More at home about the place than old Jimmy himself."

Adrienne clapped her hands beneath the table-cloth. She sparkled like a little fountain suddenly released into the sunlight. "Let me tell Jimmy!"

"And have her get it out of him on the way up from the boat? You don't know Blanche Thornton, my child. No; this is between us two. Leave it to me. I'll make all the home-breakers of history look like little faded flowers. All you'll have to do is to put up with my wistful looks and occasionally say something to me in a sentimental undertone. Doesn't make much difference what you say, so long as the other two don't hear it."

She laughed recklessly. He joined her.

"Little game called Turning the Tables, eh?"

"Oh, Andy, do you think we can do it?" murmured the guilty young wife hopefully.

Across the table the pretty girl on Captain Lawrence's left said to him sweetly: "Your wife has the softest little laugh, hasn't she? She and Captain Garret seem to be having a wonderful time."

"Oh, I'll get it out of her when we go home to-night," said Captain Lawrence blithely.

He was trying at the moment to remember what it was R. L. S. had said which Blanche obviously expected him to remember.

II.

The little house to which Lawrence had brought Adrienne, at the end of that sentimental journey whose beginning was the convent gate, stood upon a hill.

Inside the little house, which was white with a low, green roof and a jasmine vine at the doorstep, there were lights, sof.-shaded and warm, when Captain Lawrence and Mrs. Thornton came up the stepping-stones from the roadway. Sunset was fading over the world. Stars were out, a few, just palely glimmering.

She clung to his arm and gasped in pretended exhaustion; stopped at the midmost stone and swept the place with a glance just faintly smiling.

"'The warm hearthstone where the high hopes faint,' eh, Jim? A light in the window for the wandering boy. It's quite perfect, only —I can't fit you into the picture as yet. Dare-say I shall by and by. Haven't you put on an inch or so about the waist, dear old boy? One of the drawbacks of domesticity, or do you admit any drawbacks? No? I don't seem to remember that you panted like this on what few hills we climbed in the old days."

"I'm not panting!" Captain Lawrence denied indignantly.

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She laughed a little. "Then it must have been myself—take your hand off my arm, if you please, and let's make a decent entrance. Adam bringing the snake home to dinner! Jim, if you see I'm startling her, stop me. If I'm not to smoke, say so. I couldn't bear to spoil the pretty little play so soon. She loathes me, of course. You needn't pretend. I've been a bride myself. Never you mind!

"For this one evening, and morning—you said I was asked to stay the night—I shall be as harmless as a whole treeful of doves. Only keep away from me—really you must, Jim—or I shall forget and embrace you, I am so glad to see your honest face once more!"

She evaded his gallant gesture and continued on the way to the doorstep. There she slipped out of her wide, grey cape and stood forth, an amazingly pretty woman of twenty-eight or nine, with dark, unfathomable eyes under waved, honey-coloured hair, a skin as white as milk above the dusky violet of her gown, and a smile between sweetness and scepticism. She looked up at the man now from under the curving brim of a violet-feathered hat, and dropped her cape upon his outstretched hand.

"Did you carry her over the threshold the first time, Jim? In the good old way? It's an adorable little place. I'm not sure I shouldn't turn round and retrace my footsteps. Are you sure she doesn't look upon me as a Past? If not, where is she? Are you sure she isn't hiding somewhere crying her pretty eyes out, because a horrid woman that you knew before you knew her has come to life again and has to be asked to dinner?"

"Must be somewhere," Captain Lawrence declared cheerfully. "Probably in the kitchen putting on the finishing touches. She's a great little housekeeper! Come on, let's go and look for her. You two'll be crazy about each other."

He led the way across the charming living-room, with its deep, brick fireplace and well-filled bookshelves. There were bowls of flowers on tables and mantelshelf, and a growing, purple orchid trailing a spray of fragile bloom across a casement window—but no Adrienne. Silver and glass glinted on a table set for four in the dining-room just beyond, a bride's table, perfect in every fastidious detail, centred with cool-looking tea-roses, dignified with stately silver candlesticks.

"Must be in the kitchen. Let's have a look!" insisted the man of the house. He crossed the dining-room and opened the pantry door.

There was no denying the awkwardness of the next moment. There was Adrienne indeed, in the sweetest of innocent, pale-blue frocks, with a white apron about her slender waist, and before her, upon a shelf, a box of sweets from which she was, or had been, filling two slim-stemmed silver dishes for the table—but there was also Andy, and Andy was, to the most lenient marital eyes, less harmlessly employed. As a matter of fact, when Captain Lawrence opened the door, Andy was just raising Adrienne's left hand caressingly to his lips, and Adrienne, flushed face averted, was smiling—shyly!

In the instant before the door opened, Andy had said to Adrienne: "All right now. Here goes. Don't laugh!" But he had said it in a whisper, and Lawrence, naturally, had not heard it.

The moment, as has been said, was awkward. Was that powder or marshmallow dust upon Andy's left khaki shoulder? No time for inquiring.

"Adrienne!" said Adrienne's husband somewhat throatily—could he or could he not believe his eyes?—"Adrienne, here is Blanche!" Almost an indictment it was, in the guise of an introduction.

Adrienne came forward blushing. She had warned Andy that she couldn't help it, and he had admitted that it might keep her from seeming too hardened. She wiped her little hands on her apron and held out the right one with no more than the requisite amount of pleased surprise.

"I am so glad to see you," she said. "We didn't hear you come in, Jimmy. Why didn't you whistle?"

Before Jimmy could answer, which he found at the moment difficult, being very nearly asphyxiated between astonishment and uncertainty, the shameless bride added sweetly:

"Have you had a pleasant trip so far, Mrs. Thornton? And won't you come upstairs and take off your hat? We are so glad you could come. Jimmy told you we wanted you to stay the night, I hope?"

Blanche murmured that she would be only too glad. Across Adrienne's shoulder she eyed Andy with a touch of uncertainty.

"How do you, Captain Garret?"

Andy shook hands with her warmly.

"Long time no see!" he commented with his most likable smile.

"Please, Jimmy dear, tell Mitamura he may serve dinner in about ten minutes," Adrienne instructed. She took Mrs. Thornton up to her room and left behind her a silence thick as fog.

He was a wise old gentleman—or was he

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When Captain Lawrence opened the door, Andy was just raising Adrienne's left hand caressingly to his lips, and Adrienne, flushed face averted, was smiling—shyly!

at the time a young one?—who said that language was given us to conceal our thoughts. In the living-room Andy and his host discussed with great exactness the state of the weather. Upstairs, in a rose and blue bedroom as new as the first bud on the Eden-tree, the two women spoke of sea-sickness, houses, and clothes. Across the dinner-table, a little later, no less frankness obtained.

Mrs. Thornton's curiously sad eyes turned from Andy to Adrienne and back again, with something that was more than a glimmer of interest in their depths. The corners of her rather cynical mouth tipped up in a frequent smile. Once she looked at Captain Lawrence and shrugged slightly, for no apparent reason. Lawrence himself was frankly moody.

But Adrienne and Andy were radiant. She played up to all of his stories in a way no nice woman is ever supposed to do—except for her husband. When he spoke, she was eagerly silent, as he for her. They bandied nonsense between them like a boy and girl of sixteen. Dozens of times she cried to

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him: "Oh, Andy, Andy, don't you remember——" She who had never laid eyes on him before a brief two years ago! One might have thought the pair had grown up together.

"Don't have asparagus, Andy; you know you dislike it!" "Wait a bit, Adrienne, there isn't enough sugar on those strawberries for you. Ring, will you, Jim? Let Keno bring the sugar. Adrienne always takes a lot."

Jim rang and Keno brought the sugar, but he air was full of lightning. Mrs. Thornton, eating delicately and not very hungrily, made casual small talk and watched the situation develop. She quite realised, no one better, that a rather interesting little scene of her own was disintegrating definitely before the affair of Adrienne and Andy, and she was inclined at first to be bored.

It is not altogether satisfying to make an appearance in the *rôle* of a Dangerous Woman Whom the Husband Has Known, to be prepared to spare the feelings of the Bride, to repel the advances of the Husband, and then to find that instead of the centre of the stage one is occupying a position somewhere near the backdrop; that the Bride is too busy with a little sentimental comedy of her own to be even aware of danger, and that the Husband, so far from renewing old philanderous advances, has almost forgotten one's existence in the absorbing employment of watching his wife blush for another man.

After dinner, before the wood fire in the living-room, with the slight chill of the tropic night deliciously assuaged and the scent of the datura in the garden drifting in at the windows, things were no better. Adrienne lit the amethyst and amber-shaded lamps, found a deep chair for her guest, brought cigarettes in an old silver box, and sank down herself upon a cushion near the hearth. The firelight played upon her soft, brown hair and lit the almost childish sweetness of her upturned face.

"Andy has brought Maria Dolores," she explained in her gentle, carefully-inflected little voice. "I asked him to. I hope you care for Andy's songs, Mrs. Thornton, or haven't you ever heard him sing?"

"Oh, yes!" said Blanche Thornton, smiling curiously, "I have heard him sing."

She made unostentatiously a gesture of invitation to Lawrence, who was roaming in an unsettled way between window and hearth, but if he saw it he did not heed it. He sat down upon the cushioned, old settee behind Adrienne's shoulders. Andy was seated upon the farther end of it with a cigarette between his long brown fingers.

"Andy," said Adrienne with an imperious lift of her pretty chin, "get Maria Dolores and sing 'Where the Little Green Lanterns Shine!'"

"The command is forward," Andy replied obediently and went at once to fetch Maria Dolores.

Maria Dolores was a guitar which Andy had acquired, from whose strings and quite ordinary-looking, golden-brown body he had learnt to extract a quality of amorous pathos shot with whimsicality, which Blanche Thornton realised at the first wheedling, tender sound, she had never really forgotten. As for Adrienne, she sat back, white hands linked about her pale-blue taffeta knees, frankly adoring the music—or was it the musician?

He had no voice beyond a kind of recitative baritone, pleasantly husky, but once in a while he had a note of outrageous sweetness, a sort of Pied-Piper note, utterly untrained, but somehow poignant, and his repertoire was alluring. From "Little Green Lanterns" he drifted to a Japanese lullaby, thence to a fragment of "Butterfly," off to an old camp-meeting hymn, full of wild minor chords and wailing cadences, "When Moses Was in Egyp's Lan'," back to a snatch of Kipling, "For I'd like to go to Rio—Roll down, roll down to Rio."

"Sing 'Alone Upon the House-tops, to the North,'" said Adrienne dreamily.

Andy sang. Upon his blond head, too, the firelight glinted. His lovable, one-sided smile answered Adrienne's lifted eyes. Mrs. Thornton had taken a cigarette, but it rested unlit between her fingers. Lawrence leant back in his corner of the settee and stared at the fire, arms crossed. He was thinking that it would not occur to Adrienne to ask him to sing, although she must have learnt by now that he was fond of music, "Asleep in the Deep," for instance, which he sang in his bath. There were certain low notes in that he fancied he reached very nicely. He liked low notes in a song, something you could get your teeth into, as it were, a good, rolling, virile ditty suitable for a cold tub or a shower, not this la-de-da stuff Andy was doing.

"Sing 'A Life on the Rolling Wave,'" he suggested abruptly That was another of his personal favourites.

"Anything to oblige," said Andy politely.

Lawrence had some notion of singing it with him. He had even cleared his throat and, in imagination, pitched the first note, when Adrienne cooed reproachfully:

"Oh, Jimmy, that old thing!" And of course, after that, he would not have sung if his life depended upon it.

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Mrs. Thornton sat rather quiet, her charming head thrown back against the amethyst brocade cushions of her big chair, her lashes half lowered, her hands idle in her lap. She asked for only one song, and that when Andy had started to put Maria Dolores away, considerably later in the evening.

"You don't by any chance remember 'Buy My English Posies,' do you, Captain Garret?" she asked him languidly.

"H'm'm, let's see," said Andy. He experimented with Maria Dolores, his head bent over the shining curve of the wood, his fingers plucking soft, husky chords from the strings. Presently he looked up, and Mrs. Thornton looked across the hearth. Their eyes met and held oddly for a moment.

"This it?" said Andy. He sang:

"'Buy my English posies!
Kent and Surrey may—
Violets of the Undercliff
Wet with Channel spray. . . .'"

It was a haunting sort of tune. It asked for something, and it lingered tenderly along the words as if somehow without hope. "I've forgotten the dashed words," said Andy all at once. "All I remember is:

"'Take the flower and turn the hour
And kiss your love again!'"

He sang that over once or twice.

"Sorry!" he said.

"Thanks for that much," said Mrs. Thornton. She got up unexpectedly. "I am so tired," she admitted, "and the thought of a real bed is so wonderful—should I be too badly behaved if I——?"

"Oh, certainly, if you are tired!" murmured Adrienne hospitably.

The little group about the fire broke up at once.

"Breakfast at eight," Lawrence announced with a touch of conjugal masterfulness. "Blanche's boat goes at ten, Adrienne."

Adrienne smiled her docile acceptance.

"Shouldn't you like to run in and have breakfast with us, Andy? Do! Then the party will last that much longer."

Eyes met and veered from all quarters. Lawrence offered no endorsement of his wife's hospitality, but he could not very well command her to withdraw the invitation.

"Then we do not say good-bye as yet?" said Mrs. Thornton. She gave her hand to Andy with a smile somehow wistful.

"Unpleasant word! Why say it?" Andy returned lightly.

He expressed himself as yearning to come to breakfast, after which he reluctantly took himself off. Mrs. Thornton drifted upstairs to her room, a rather fragile, white hand clinging to the stair-rail as she went. Captain Lawrence closed doors and locked windows in a grimly impressive silence. At the end of this bit of business he turned to receive Adrienne's repentant explanations. Adrienne was not there. She had gone unobtrusively but effectually to bed, explaining nothing.

By the time he reached their white-and-amber-curtained bedroom she was to all appearances sleeping sweetly, with her brown hair flowing over the pillow, one little hand curled close above her heart. Upon his own bed his pyjamas lay nicely folded, and beneath the reading-lamp on the little table the book he had been reading the night before, the enamelled carafe, and the glass. Lawrence took off his shoes with some violence and shied them across the room, which did not in the least disturb the charming sleeper. Her white breast rose and fell as evenly as ever behind convent walls.

"I never thought it would come to this!" said the injured husband loudly and reproachfully.

Only the cackle of the wind in a loosened window-sash made reply. He cursed bitterly and got into bed. The first quarrel, the first rift in the lute. "When a man's married his trouble begins." Was that the Stevenson thing? No; that was Mother Goose! And Blanche looking on at the whole show with that sceptical smile of hers! Probably thought he'd been made a fool of already; probably thought the girl he'd married didn't care a darn about him! He writhed when he remembered that he had meant to leave his exquisite domesticity only just long enough for a little excursion in romance with Blanche. Women—bah! That was what a man got for trusting them. He'd always known it, of course, only somehow Adrienne . . .

He slept very badly. And across the hall Mrs. Thornton, turning a tiresome pillow at intervals during the night, fared not much better.

Adrienne was downstairs at seven, fresh as a rose and full of little housewifely anxieties. Lawrence had slept rather heavily after five in the morning, and in that interval she slipped away. When he came down at fifteen minutes before eight, straight and handsome in his fresh uniform and perfectly ready to listen to apologies, Adrienne was standing beside the purple orchid, fingering it delicately, with Andy at her elbow.

"Hullo, old boy!" said Andy.

"'Morning, Jimmy dear!" cried Adrienne happily.

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The false friend had come early. They had been whispering. So much was obvious.

"Where's Mrs. Thornton, dear?" asked Adrienne.

"How the deuce do I know?" returned her husband fiercely.

"Sorry!" murmured Adrienne soothingly; then over her shoulder, in a tone of car ssing reproach. "Don't laugh at him, Andy. He isn't feeling well; can't you see?"

"I never felt better in my life," Lawrence assured the universe between set teeth.

"Good-morning, everybody!" interrupted a gentle drawl from the head of the stairs—but it was not, when all was said and done, any too good a morning for those most intimately concerned.

The dining-room swam in sunshine of a peculiarly limpid clarity. Keno's coffee was ambrosial, her rolls feather-light and browned to a turn. Silver and glass gleamed immaculate. In the window facing the mountains a little yellow bird in a gilt wicker cage sang—perhaps superfluously. But conversation went on three feet with the fourth awkwardly upheld. There was at that breakfast no really easy nonsense talked.

Adrienne inquired if Mrs. Thornton had slept. Mrs. Thornton, with faint violet smudges beneath her wistful eyes, lied pleasantly that she had never slept better. Andy occupied a skilful three minutes with a monologue on the joys of sleep.

Adrienne demanded of her husband, who had had two cups of coffee and was requesting a third with all the unostentation of a man acquiring the drug habit because of unhappy domestic affairs, whether he meant to be at home for lunch, and Captain Lawrence, unsmiling, replied briefly that such was his intention. Andy descanted at some length upon the luck of those who had a home to go to, and Mrs. Thornton said mostly nothing at all.

Mercifully the feast was soon over. Then, while the four lingered uneasily in the living-room, Adrienne launched her last demure bolt.

"I think, if you don't mind," she said sweetly to Mrs. Thornton, "I shan't go down to the boat with you. Andy has promised to give me my first lesson on Maria Dolores, and I know Jimmy will take beautiful care of you."

It was, of course, unspeakable. Mrs. Thornton hesitated, glancing, startled, from Captain Lawrence to Andy. Andy smiled delightfully. But it was within the outraged bosom of Lawrence himself that the storm really broke. He put down the book he had been regarding unseeingly, with what amounted to a thud. He turned on his heel. He faced his wife grimly. Then he spoke:

"I am going to let *Andy* take Mrs Thornton down to the boat," he said, with classic simplicity. "I find I've got some work to look after at home, here, that will keep me."

"I hope you don't mind going with *me?*" Andy put in quietly.

She looked at him, bit her soft lower lip, and shrugged, turning away.

Not very long after that good-byes were said. Mrs. Thornton gave a cool, friendly hand to her host, smiled into his eyes, and murmured a commonplace. She did not again remind him of R. L. S. With Adrienne she hesitated, perhaps, stood a shade longer uncertain. At last she showed a kind of conciliatory softness:

"It has been so nice to see you. I had wanted to so much. All of Jim's friends must be happy over his good fortune."

A little flush crept up over Adrienne's satiny cheeks. She hesitated in her turn. Then the thought of "Elizabeth" came back to harden her heart. "That is so sweet of you," she said clearly. "It means everything to me that Jimmy's friends should be pleased."

Irreproachably done, of course, but any man that ever breathed would have admitted she needed whipping. She turned away from the threshold as Andy and Mrs. Thornton went down the stepping stones together.

"Jimmy," she began, with a delightfully impersonal thoughtfulness, "I think if you are going to be busy this morning, I shall just take the car and run into town."

But she didn't. At the look in Jimmy's eyes, the ridiculously hurt, incredulous look of a small boy who has been punished undeservedly, she flung herself into his arms and hid her face upon his considerably unsettled heart.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she sighed amazingly. "I needn't have worried at all, need I? I do it quite as well as she does."

Andy's two-seater was standing at the foot of the hill. He helped Mrs. Thornton in and settled himself beside her. They drove off through the scented sweetness of the morning. Below them the town spread fan-wise to the sea. Taro patches chequered the nearer valley. Cloud-shadows hung purple on the mountains.

"Wonderful day!" said Andy politely.

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Their Yuletide *Rôles.*

By M. Owston-Booth.

Whatever parts cinema stars may play in the course of their daily work, they all play the part of Santa Claus at Christmas. This article tells you something about their Yuletide activities.

Miss Lois Wilson seems to have been sharing in Santa Claus' bounty herself. A complete winter sports outfit is worth having.

THE modern movie-goer has no illusions.

A systematic perusal of that section of the press devoted to such matters will suffice to convince the most incredulous that screen stars hoe their own potatoes and generally behave and grow out of their twenties like the people one wants to kill in 'bus queues.

How the limelight slipped on to these personal spots is more than one story. Some folks would tell you that the interviewing section of the scribbling tribe started the thing by getting into the stars' drawing-room disguised as screen critics and coming out with sensational recipes for raspberry buns and happy marriages paragraphed on the left cuff. Others lay the damage at the door of Bryant Washburn, equally famous as screen star and inventor of the idea of confessing marriage at a time when matrimony was the one folly no screen star dared to make known if he or she preferred popularity to the poverty pinch.

Said Washburn, deliverer of the picture people from the deceit that threatened to drag them down into the darkest difficulties of affected singleness,—said Washburn, breaking away from the well-meaning but misguided friends who, believing strongly in the pull of romantic glamour over the cold unvarnished truth, thought him afflicted with the same "falling sickness" that undid our old friend J. Caesar:—"I will advertise my marriage instead of my next picture. I will cut myself adrift from the mash-note girls; I will be honest with my admirers. I will show them that I am an ordinary person living an ordinary life. I will create a precedent for those heroes and heroines of the great

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public who would rather be thought of wrestling respectably with the servant problem than drinking the cocktails of reckless bachelorhood in the cafés of the carefree."

Or other words to that effect! Anyhow Washburn did make a dustheap of the fallacious notions about the blessedness of apparent singleness, with its romantic atmosphere, to a celebrity, and he may have started the craze for the domestic delving that the great god Publicity does to-day.

All of which is a mere introduction to the fact that the screen star's Christmas is just like anybody else's Christmas.

For apart from a few inessentials like a home with five bathrooms and a swimming-pool in the back garden, a thousand-flattering-letter mail per week and one's picture in every really nice paper, Paris models ad lib. and a world tour holiday whenever one feels tired, loud cheers from the crowd as one's car turns the corner and a bunch of fat, crispy super-contracts to sneer at every single time the retiring rumour goes around—apart from a few inessentials like these, screen stars live just exactly as you and I. And the modern movie-goer has no illusions about it.

Toward the end of the month of August every screen star begins to receive missives from magazine editors and the people they encourage to eke out a miserable existence by their wits and words, imploring personal

Miss Shirley Mason is just off to do her Christmas shopping. Mr. Thomas Meighan, having done his, is chuckling over the muff he has bought for a very small lady friend.

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confessions of how they spend the festive season. And the stars are helpless. Even their press-agents let their pens lie—wait!—I use the word in its passive sense—idle, for the season's festivities are pretty much the same in filmland as in Fulham or the fish trade.

Indeed, any day during the week that precedes the 25th of December, in any town where the film folks are found, you would see any star you like to name, investing a few minutes' salary in expensive toys for the children, cigarettes and silk stockings for Grandma, *negligées* for the servants and turkey for all.

To every star in screenland the past year has yielded up many and various characters to be interpreted and transferred to celluloid and from thence to the silver sheet; yet Yuletide, the great leveller, reduces tragedians and comedians, *ingénues* and vampires alike to the selfsame *rôle* as the great public plays—the *rôle* of Santa Claus.

—even William S. Hart seems to have enjoyed himself among the dolls and teddy bears.

If the *rôle* is played better by this professional crowd than some of us can manage, the reason is one of finance; and that doesn't go for much!

Miss Lila Lee has evidently got the pick of the toy department, while—

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